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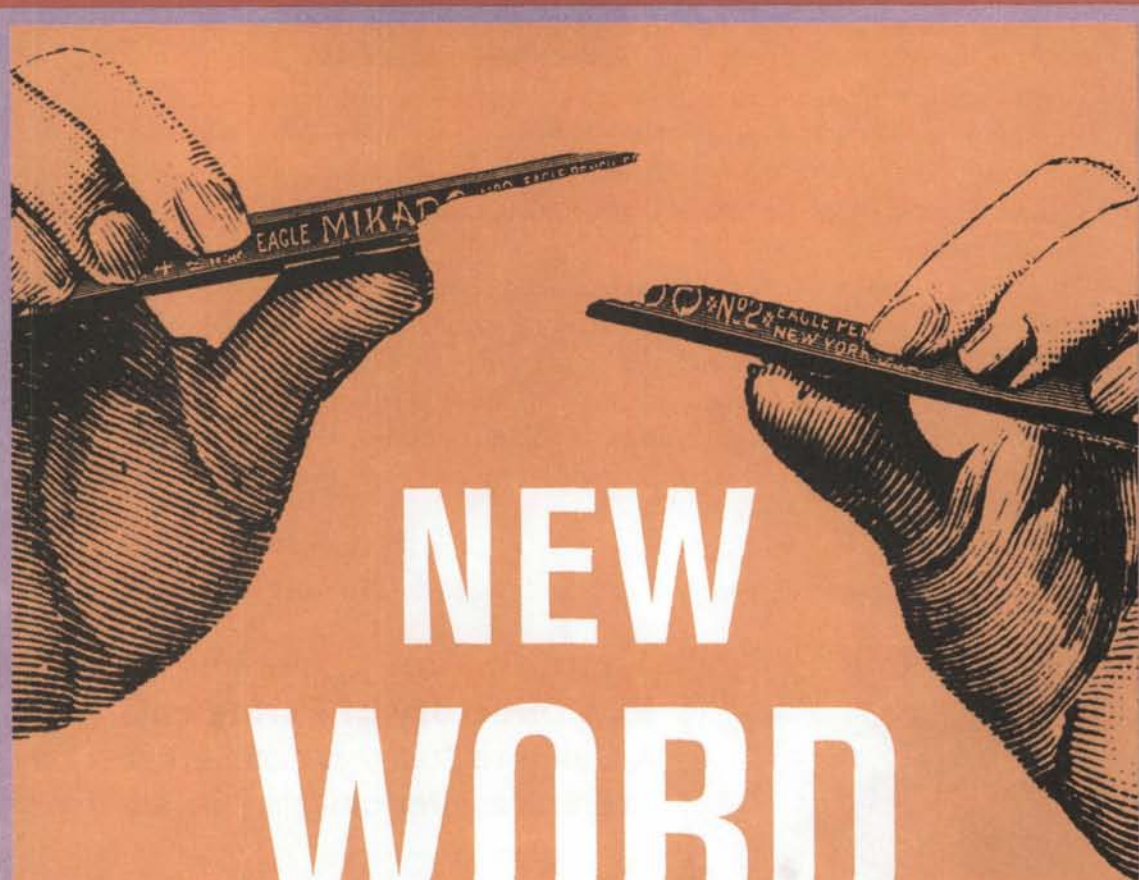
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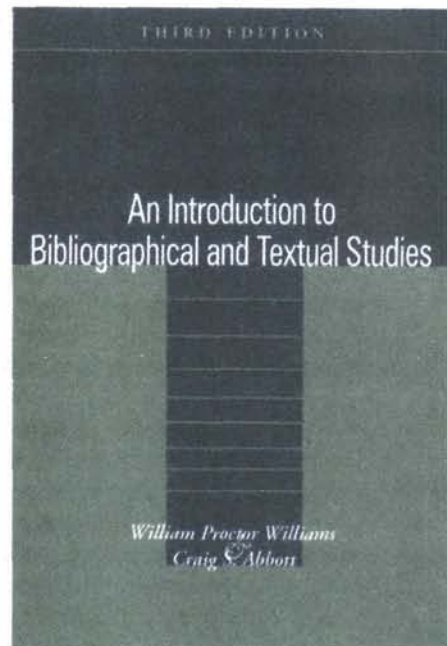
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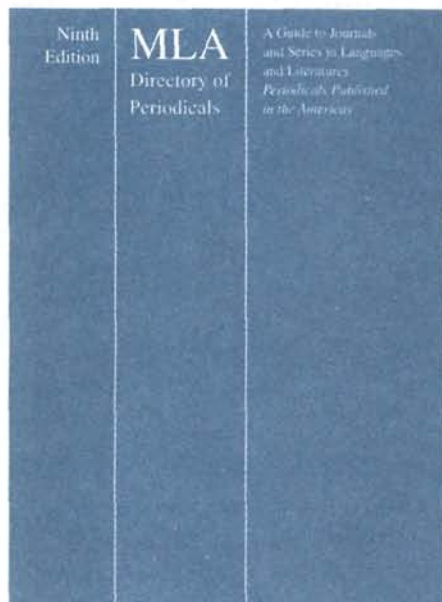


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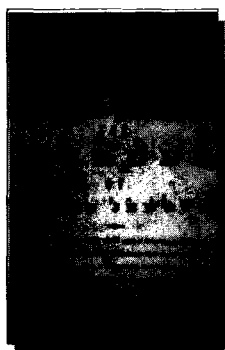
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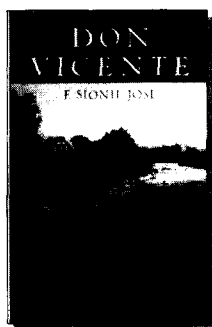


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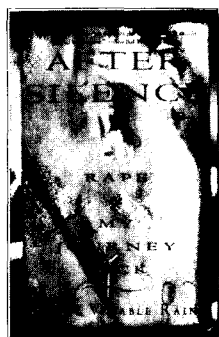
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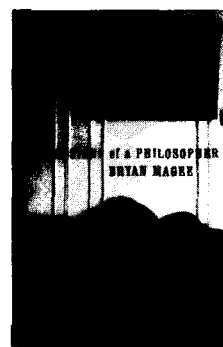


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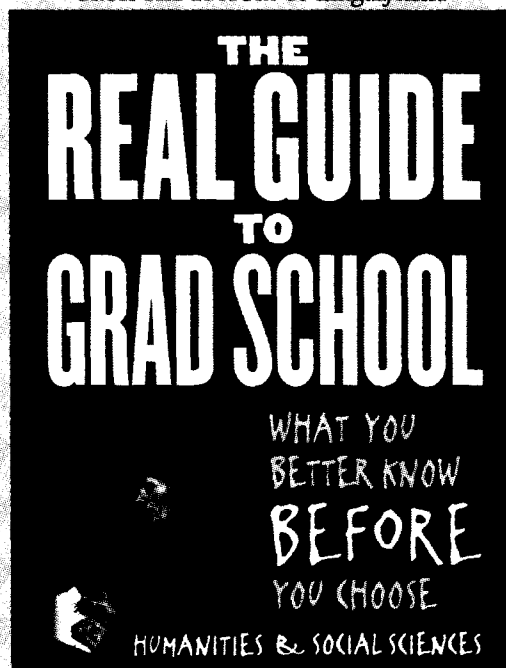
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ANDREW PARKER, Professor of English,
Amherst College

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This fall, a computer will be handing out grades in at least one university classroom. Its inventors say it evaluates student essays as accurately as a professor would—simply by calculating the frequency and distribution of words. Nonsense, say linguists: Is the meaning of language simply a function of statistics? How intelligent is the Intelligent Essay Assessor?

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Are machines rational? What does the latest trend in software design owe to an architect? Can a map ever be useful to the blind? Not long ago, these conundrums would have been the stuff of airy speculation. Today, technology-savvy professors suspect they have it all figured out. Lingua Franca presents twenty scholars whose innovative high-tech research has yielded answers—and questions—for the information age.

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When David Stoll accused Guatemalan activist, Nobel Prize-winner, and radical icon Rigoberta Menchú of deception, he became a bête noire to the left and a cause célèbre to the right. But Stoll's argument—and Guatemalan history—is more complex than the ideological mudslinging suggests. A behind-the-scenes account of how a Middlebury College anthropologist's quest to redraw the battle lines of the Guatemalan civil war raised tough questions, both about Guatemala and about himself.

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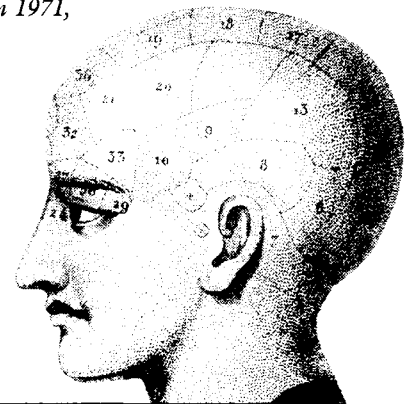
John Rawls's A Theory of Justice is among this century's most famous works. Since its publication in 1971, the hefty blueprint for a liberal society has sold 200,000 copies and inspired more than five thousand essays and books. But Rawls himself has remained a mystery. A close look at what the theory owes to the man.

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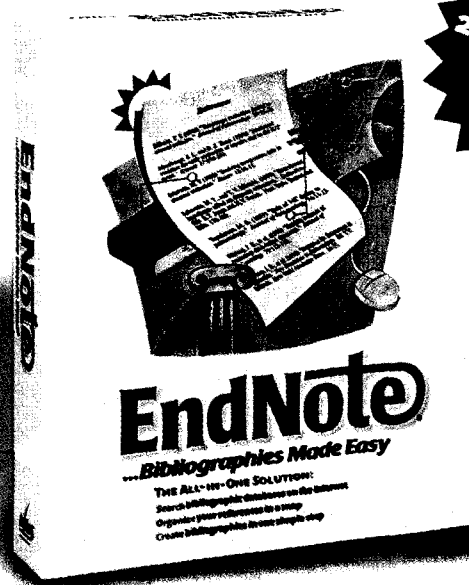
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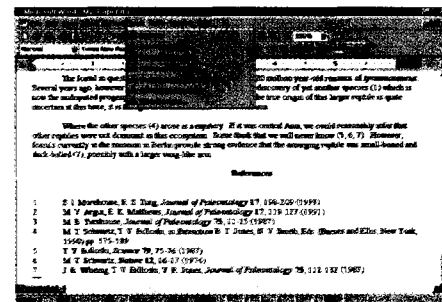


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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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WAR OF PETITIONS

Readers of David Greenberg's "All the President's Men" [Field Notes, April 1999] may recall an episode that Greenberg passes over in a phrase: Sean Wilentz's pro-Clinton testimony before the House Judiciary Committee. *The New York Times* criticized what it called Wilentz's "lecture" to congresspeople as "gratuitously patronizing." Now, a similar humility propels Wilentz to tell *Lingua Franca* that with his *New York Times* ad he pulled off what he calls "the most important academic political effort in the last thirty years." Think of it: What he has done with one ad is more important than anti-Vietnam War activities, canon revisions, women's and minority studies programs, and affirmative action; not to mention Olin Foundation grants, Eugene Genovese's Historical Society, *The Bell Curve*, and attacks on affirmative action.

With a strong sense of his own event-making, Wilentz recalls the exact moment of his historic intervention: "At 11:16 A.M. on October 19, I sent out my first batch of emails...." Thus, he created what he calls "a movement." Historians should know the difference between a movement and a newspaper ad.

The petition Joanne Landy and I circulated earlier this year, signed by some three hundred people, served to remind leftists and liberals that it was possible to oppose impeachment-for-Lewinsky while challenging Clinton on other fronts. Historian Robert Johnston has called Clinton "the most reactionary Democratic President in eighty years." Clinton has co-opted innumerable Republican programs. He supported the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, the Defense of Marriage Act, "don't ask, don't tell," NAFTA, the abolition of welfare, increased military spending, and the barbaric bombing of increasing numbers of countries.

Too many scholars have pressed their own mute buttons when it came to Clinton's dark side, for fear that speaking critically would give strength to the right. Their silence has given strength, instead, to that dark side, and their support of the imperial presidency has contributed to Clinton's grotesque and illegal bombing of Yugoslavia. Let's end the moratorium on rigorous assessment of Clinton's abysmal record. We do indeed need a movement to help us to see things more clearly, and Schlesingers and Schlesingers-in-waiting like Sean Wilentz are not going to get us there.

JESSE LEMISCH
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, JOHN JAY
COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

LOST IN TRANSLATION

Having spoken at length with John Palattella while he was working on "Atlas of the Difficult World" [May/June 1999], I was surprised to find myself invisible in the article itself except for a bare bibliographical mention. On that basis, readers may have formed the impression that my colleague Katharine Washburn was in effect the sole editor of *World Poetry: An Anthology of Verse From Antiquity to Our Time*. In fact, she and I were co-editors of the book, which should have been referred to as Washburn and Major (Clifton Fadiman served in an advisory role as general editor). Washburn was responsible for poetry in European languages plus Arabic, Hebrew, and Persian; I selected the poetry in all other languages, plus European-language verse by non-Euroamerican poets. Without the contributions of both editors, the book would hardly deserve its title.

One may perhaps worry, with Stephen Owen, that the present worldwide dominance of English exerts pressure on poets in other languages to become part

of an Anglophone "world poetry" mainstream. But the poets from around the world represented in Washburn and Major were not writing with the translator in mind. Instead, what the anthology shows is that the making of verse has been a central human activity over enormous spans of time and distance and at least some of that verse can be made accessible and enjoyable as an aspect of contemporary culture. That is not a small achievement.

JOHN S. MAJOR
NEW YORK, NY

It's great to see *Lingua Franca* focusing attention on the new international poetry anthologies. However, I found myself disagreeing with what I was quoted as saying in the article. Remarks I made about the common tendency to translate poetry into familiar and mainstream idioms were presented as criticisms of particular foreign-language poets. I was actually criticizing American modes of domestication that often elide cultural differences and linguistic resistances.

CHARLES BERNSTEIN
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND
COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
SUNY BUFFALO

ORGONE ORACLE

Hal Cohen's article "A Secret History of the Sexual Revolution" [March] drips with contempt when it portrays Wilhelm Reich as a "crank," a "mad scientist," "bizarre," and "weird." Cohen ignores the fact that many natural scientists have verified Reich's findings. In fact, Reich's 1930s experiments on human sexual excitation predated by decades similar work by Masters and Johnson. His later observations of lifelike microscopic structures (bions) within sterilized nutrient media also pre-date by decades similar findings by contemporary microbiologists, particularly regarding extremophiles,

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Field Notes

THE CRITIQUE OF PURE POP

IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING that philosophers rarely get into brawls with top forty musicians and parents. But Roger Scruton, Britain's outspoken conservative philosopher and critic of things cool, is anything but typical.

Late last March, Scruton found himself the object of considerable attention when the Pet Shop Boys, a venerable British techno-pop band, filed an \$80,000 libel suit against him and his publisher. The specific offense? It's in the pages of Scruton's most recent book, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture* (Duckworth, 1998), in which the fifty-five-year-old philosopher evinces contempt for most things modern. In a chapter called "Yoofanasia," Scruton puts forth the following: "Sometimes, as with the Spice Girls or the Pet Shop Boys, serious doubts arise as to whether the performers made more than a minimal contribution to the recording, which owes its trade mark to subsequent sound engineering."

The offending statement is less a critique of the bands in question than an extension of Scruton's ongoing efforts to explain what's wrong with modern music. In his book *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford, 1997), Scruton defines good musical taste as "the sum of those preferences that would emerge in a well-

ordered soul." And what would such a soul shop for at Tower Records? Mozart and Vivaldi, apparently. "Classical harmony provides us with an archetype of human sympathy," Scruton muses. "The ability to notice a bass line, to feel the rightness of the notes and of the harmonies that erupt from them, is the ability to respond to a wider world,

to value the other voice, and to situate both self and other in a moralized universe."

By this measure, most of us are in deep trouble. To Scruton, today's pop music, which bonds its listener to the performer rather than the song, is almost entirely devoid of musical merit. A tune by Nirvana's Kurt Cobain offers only a "ghostly resemblance to melody," and its harmonies swim in a "soup of amplified overtones." R.E.M.'s "Losing My Religion" is dismally "shapeless": "no triad is ever inverted, and nothing moves between the chords, so that all

is absorbed in rhythm." And electronic dance music is even worse. The Pet Shop Boys' mechanized thumps and illusory heartbeats are an assault on his classically trained ear: "Beat is not rhythm," he explains, "but the last sad skeleton of rhythm, stripped bare of human life."

Who then, is to blame for shifting the public ear from Performance Today to K-Rock? In *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture*, he points his accusatory finger at "a new human type" emerging in modern cities—a.k.a. the youth of the 1990s:



"Youth culture is a global force. It has its own language, its own customs, its own territory and its own self-contained economy." It also has its own music, whose sound, according to Scruton, is defined by bands like R.E.M., Prodigy, and Oasis (whom he once denounced in a lecture as "mindless oafs").

These bands aren't taking Scruton to court, but they do have their defenders, even among the intelligentsia. John Sutherland, a well known Victorianist and University of London professor, argues that "there is certainly more to [R.E.M.] than meets the jaded ear of Roger Scruton." In a February issue of *The London Review of Books*, he went on to point out, "The notion that this group [R.E.M.], at this moment, represents the 'voice of youth' is peculiar enough...Michael Stipe [R.E.M.'s lead singer] is knocking on 40!" Indeed, skin-and-bones Stipe is looking

"Beat is not rhythm," says Scruton, "but the last sad skeleton of rhythm, stripped bare of human life."

much worse for wear than his "aesthetician critic," whose author photo consumes the entire back cover of *An Intelligent Person's Guide*. (Sutherland also unravels "The Sad Professor," a dirgelike track on R.E.M.'s album *UP* that tells the story of a boring, drunk, and miserable literature professor. "Michael Stipe is serenading me and Roger Scruton," he surmises.)

Apparently, Scruton not only dislikes "the new human type" created by youth culture, he also wants to keep this type out of his home. In an April feature story in the London

Guardian, Scruton described how he will bring his son Samuel, then five months old, through his formative years, steering him as far away as possible from toxins like pop music, baseball hats, and baggy pants. "My wife Sophie and I have decided to offer Sam a genuinely deprived childhood," Scruton explains. "Sam is being educated not so as to enjoy himself, but so that other people will enjoy him." For the duration of what Scruton calls Sam's "ordeal," the boy will not watch television or play with toys or drink Coca-Cola. He will, however, read Greek by age six, play the piano and viola, and attend church regularly.

The education of Samuel Scruton is not exactly a Dickensian horror, but it's not a walk in the park, either. Even Scruton acknowledges that Sam may "just become a cruel experiment in parenting." Think of John Stuart Mill, who, raised by a philosopher father

with a Scruton-like strong arm, suffered a terrible breakdown at twenty. Rejecting his father's teachings, Mill found inspiration in Wordsworth, the Oasis of his day. *Guardian* readers predict that a troubled adulthood lies ahead for young Sam Scruton, too. Suggested one letter writer, "The *Guardian* should invite Mr. Scruton to provide us with a regular column on bringing up young Samuel, the proceeds to be invested to pay for therapy required in later life."

For the moment, the new father has more immediate concerns—like his pending lawsuit. The Pet Shop Boys could still drop the charges, since the financial stakes are not terribly high. Nor is it too late for Scruton to make nice and apologize: Weirdly enough, after news of the suit first broke, he told one reporter, "Actually, I quite like the Pet Shop Boys—certainly the early stuff."

HILLARY FREY

LEITER FLUID

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE rankings to induce apoplexy in an academic, especially one whose college or department sits, forlorn, at the bottom of the charts. *U.S. News & World*

Report and the National Research Council are familiar with angry complaints. So, too, is Brian Leiter, a professor of law and philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin who issues

a semiannual assessment of philosophy departments. As much as his insider status helps him keep a finger on the pulse of the discipline, it has also caused him to touch a few nerves.

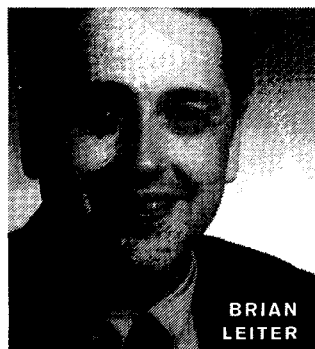
Leiter has been playing the ranking game since 1989. As a graduate student at the University of Michigan, he drew up a brief guide to help undergraduates choose among departments. For the next few years, he mailed what he called *The Philosophical Gourmet Report*—the name plays on the title of the *Gourman Report*, a venerable graduate school

What began as a casual sideline has become a major information source for prospective philosophers in the United States.

guide that Leiter considers worthless—to a few dozen friends. Photocopiers started humming, and the document was soon circulating samizdat-style among college seniors. In

1996 New York University's philosophy department—not coincidentally, one of Leiter's favorites—asked to post his guide on its Web site. Other departments added links to it on their home pages. Finally, in 1997, the British publisher Blackwell bought the rights, giving the report the imprimatur of a respected scholarly publisher and a new Web address (www.blackwellpublishers.co.uk). What began as a casual sideline has become the major information source for prospective philosophers in the United States.

Leiter's list of top programs is hardly a shock: After years of poaching stars from other departments, New York University stands first, nosing ahead of longtime no. 1, Princeton. Pittsburgh, Rutgers, and Michigan follow close



behind. But Leiter's guide also goes into depth, ranking the top sixty or so departments not only by overall quality but also by strength within every conceivable subfield. It includes brief sketches of the top players in each program, summarizes recent faculty moves, and even provides the lowdown on job offers to various professors.

An indefatigable networker who loves to dish, Leiter keeps an eye on his colleagues' productivity by monitoring publishers' catalogs and major journals. Meanwhile, a flurry of email correspondence with

dozens of philosophers across the country keeps him apprised of faculty raids and shifting reputations. Sure, Leiter concedes, the report is subjective, but he's confident that it's by far the best available—and many students agree. "When you talk about where you're situated, it's the Leiter report that tends to be definitive," says one CUNY graduate student.

At least one subset of philosophers is infuriated by the guide's growing influence. The report "begins and ends in bias," says John Stuhr, chairman of the philosophy department at Penn State. "Anyone who does form judgments on the basis of the *Philosophical Gourmet Report* probably should not apply to graduate programs." Bruce Wilshire, a philosopher at Rutgers Uni-

**Leiter's report
"begins and
ends in bias,"
says John Stuhr
of Penn State.**

versity, goes further. He calls the guide "a fatuous piece of bullshit."

Whence the wrath? The report rubs salt in an old wound: the subordinate status of Continental philosophy in America. For decades, Anglo-American philosophy has been dominated by the intellectual progeny of Gottlob Frege, A.J. Ayer, and W.V. Quine, scholars who took the linguistic turn and began looking at philosophical conundrums as problems of language. Literary critics and historians may be far more likely to cite Heidegger, Foucault, or Derrida than Quine & co., but professional philosophers who study the Continental tradition are a distinct minority.

Leiter, who specializes in ethics and the philosophy of law, says up front that his interest is in analytic departments and that if he had just side-stepped the Continental issue he might have escaped controversy. But instead, he has taken several swipes at the Continental crowd. In the 1996–1997 report, he suggested that students interested in Continental philosophy steer clear of the "Continental underground"—departments, he wrote, that "shun mainstream analytic philosophy." He fingered Penn State, Northwestern, and SUNY Stony Brook. "As it turns out," he added, in his singularly self-assured voice, "the best scholarly work on Continental philosophy is generally done at the predominantly analytic departments."

Fighting words, to be sure. Then he threw gasoline on the fire: "Students interested in 'postmodernism' (e.g., Derrida, Lyotard) would be better off applying to graduate programs in literary theory, since philosophers generally do not (for good reason) take this stuff seriously."

The Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP), the major organization for Continental philosophy in the United States, has mounted a counterattack. Last spring, it posted a statement on its Web site condemning the guide. Then it persuaded the editors of the *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* to reprint the manifesto. (It appears in the journal's November 1998 issue.) In it, SPEP denounces Leiter's primary claim as "sheer prejudice." For students who want to be trained in the full range of Continental philosophy, the group says, it's simply common sense to study in a department with

a Continental bent rather than an analytic stronghold with a token Heideggerian.

The group also rejects the suggestion that departments like Penn State, Northwestern, and Stony Brook "shun" analytic philosophy. What sets these places apart, SPEP argues, is not narrowness but its opposite: an embrace of diverse philosophical strategies. Finally, the philosophers put in a plug for Derrida: "Philosophical postmodernism," the statement says, "deserves to be a full participant in the conversation that constitutes contemporary philosophy."

"If he wants to do a report on analytic philosophy, that's fine," says Linda Martín Alcoff of Syracuse University (rank: 30), who serves as SPEP's co-director. "But we would like to call on him to cease and desist his uninformed denigration of Continental philosophy. It is really unethical and irresponsible."

In the 1998–2000 report, Leiter drops the "Continental underground" line but otherwise stands by his argument. Continental philosophers are often in demand, he says, but the best jobs invariably go to those of them who are trained at top analytic departments. "Most of the people in SPEP don't do very good work," he avers. "I'm pretty candid about this view, and it doesn't make them happy."

He readily admits that Continental philosophy has produced more epoch-shaping geniuses than analytic philosophy—who has been more widely read and influential, after all, Foucault or Quine? But he adds that the precision and clarity of the analytic approach is necessary in separating the insights of Continental thinkers from their woolly literary flourishes. "In the field I know best, Nietzsche studies," he writes in his report, "the work by

scholars at the leading non-analytic programs ranges largely from the incompetent to the merely obscure.”

Not all of Leiter’s colleagues agree. Referees at traditionally analytic presses, like MIT and Oxford’s Clarendon imprint, routinely approve books by Continental philosophers from schools like Stony Brook. But although they are expressed in unusually blunt fashion, Leiter’s judgements are hardly idio-

syncratic. They reflect longstanding prejudices that many scholars had hoped were fading away. The codification of these views in an influential guide, SPEP fears, threatens to deepen the old divisions in the next generation of American philosophers.

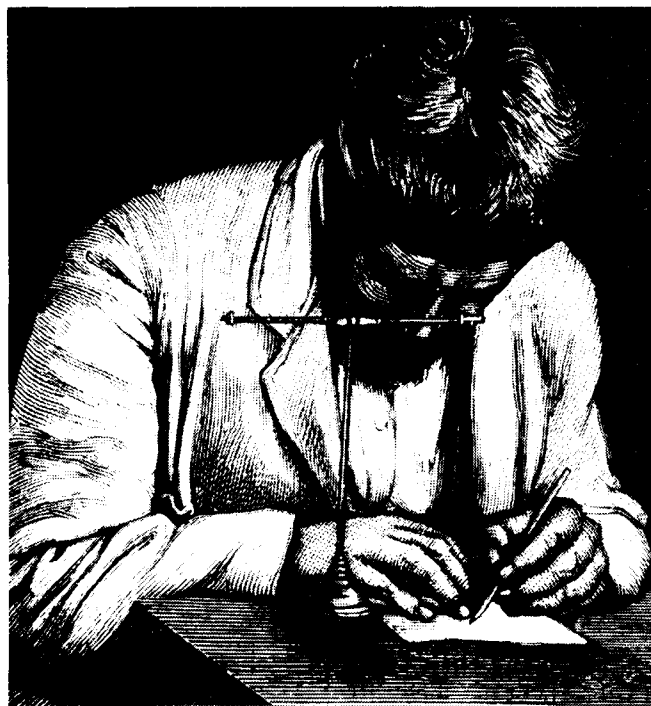
Many of Leiter’s fans remain unperturbed by his sparring match with SPEP. “If people don’t like it, they can ignore it or publish their own report, I

would think,” says a graduate student at the University of Arizona. Some critics are doing just that. A parody maintained by J. David Velleman of the University of Michigan takes aim at the Leiter’s hubris. (In Velleman’s *Lighter Report*, the University of Texas at Austin ranks second, behind the Lyceum and the Sixth Circle of Hell, which are tied for first place.) In a more direct challenge, a graduate student at SUNY Stony Brook

named John Hartmann has started up his own guide to Continental departments called *The Hartmann Report* (www.geocities.com/Athens/1575/report.html). It runs only a few pages; the advice is sparse and sometimes breathless (Penn State: “Fantastic!”); and the writer’s authority is a big question mark.

Then again, Brian Leiter also started small.

CHRISTOPHER SHEA



THE HOUSE OF STYLUS

THE TRADITIONAL IMAGE OF the theoretical physicist comes straight from the silver screen: A giddy, disheveled madman frenetically scribbles symbols across a chalkboard until—voilà!—he compresses the problem into one neat equation. (Cue insane chuckle of glee, then a manic shout, “I’ll

show them all!”) To some degree, computers have changed all that. As the technology has gotten fancier—capable of whipping up van Gogh visuals from mathematical equations, predicting the behavior of hurricanes, processing hundreds of data points at once—scientists have

increasingly turned to the keyboard instead of the drawing pad. Is this progress? Maybe not, according to Joseph Hollweg of the Solar-Terrestrial Theory Group at the University of New Hampshire. “Computer simulations are transient,” he says. But a handwritten expression is enduring: “It contains all of the physics all of the time.”

Hollweg and his colleagues study the sun: its superheated corona, jets of gas called spicules, and continuously outflowing solar wind. But of the six members of his study group, only two have any real expertise in the computer simulations that have become common coin in many scientific disciplines. Instead, Hollweg and his colleagues start with written analysis and use computers only to test their scrawled hypotheses, not to generate them. “There was a time back in the 1980s when computational work was coming into vogue,” says Hollweg. “Some people made career changes. Those of us here didn’t do that—partially out of taste, partially out of talent.”

Are physicists like Hollweg Luddites, or are they the keepers of a sacred flame? One objective indication that their work is valued is financial: This year, NASA gave the group—which it has supported since

Citing its reliance on pencil-and-paper analysis, NASA gave the Solar-Terrestrial Theory Group more than \$1 million in funding.

1980, when NASA’s funding program began—another three years’ cash, \$1,163,000 total. In its announcement, NASA specifically mentioned the group’s reliance on pencil-and-paper analysis as a factor in its decision.

Most physicists, of course, use many types of tools in their work. The tension between code-happy geeks and pencil-centric types, note theorists on both ends of the continuum, is more a matter of emphasis than of a simple “choose your weapon!” dichotomy. Still, the difference between the two approaches is significant. Simply put, written analysis requires the mental distillation of a problem into a palatable chunk of abstraction: All unnecessary factors must be eliminated to get the simplest possible expression. Computer

simulations, on the other hand, are more like stone soup. Researchers are free to toss every bit of observed data into the computer code, stirring and adjusting until the result matches the real world. The problem, critics say, is that the cooks may not understand exactly *why* the recipe came out right—or be able to whip it up again or pass it on to another chef.

“Computer simulations are a very powerful tool in principle,” remarks UNH physics professor Marty Lee, a member of Hollweg’s team. “But it comes down to the general point: What does it really mean to understand something? You can take a very complicated problem, like the movement of water splashing down over a book, and set up a computer simulation until you get an image that looks right. But what have you learned? Just because you can reproduce it doesn’t mean you understand it.” The very process of putting pencil to paper and deciding which factors are essential and which can be disregarded, argues Lee, triggers a cognitive process that may be more labor intensive but leads to a deeper knowledge—the creative intuition that is at the core of scientific thinking.



Nonsense, counter proponents of computer simulations. Paper-and-pencil analysis may be helpful and even efficient for simple problems, but there’s an obvious downside: Such radical simplification can render complex phenomena into beautiful but beside-the-point abstractions. “In some fields, as the theory develops, numeric [i.e., computer] work can actually drive the intuition as well,” argues Daniel Eisenstein, a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. He points to research done on a wavelength pattern known as the Lyman Alpha forest: A series of computer simulations performed in 1994 debunked a model that had been used for roughly fifteen years. “It created a sea change in the understanding of cosmic gases,” demonstrating that these gases operate more like undulations than clouds, explains Eisenstein.

Do computers allow physicists to solve problems without understanding them?

More pointedly, Robert Rosner, a professor of astronomy at the University of Chicago, pooh-poohs the notion that increased use of computer simulations will kill off pencil-and-paper work. Most serious researchers in the field, he says, continue to practice both. Science, he explains, is a constant cycle between observation and theory—and whereas computer simulation was originally seen as a tool for developing theories, it has now become useful for testing theories as well. “On the computer we can create a mini universe that follows our rules precisely and whose behavior can be measured with rea-

sonable precision,” he says. “Such calculations can be viewed as ideal experiments.”

So both tools may be used in harmony? Ideally, yes. But as with many fields, specialization may act as a deterrent. “In a sense, it is dangerous,” muses Sarbani Basu, a helioseismologist (a.k.a. sunquake expert) at the Institute for Advanced Study who works mostly with computer-based data solutions. “I have seen people do numeric work without exploring the physical principles behind the thing.”

She recalls a time when people in her lab were attempting a particularly difficult calculation. “We thought we’d save a lot of time, and it was easier to just shove it into a computer and see how results came out; none of the people in the group were terribly analytically oriented.” The problem they were working on, she says, was complex enough that the trade-off was worth it. But she can imagine a situation in which deferring to the computer—although tempting—might not be such a great idea. “You think, should I work this all out on paper or just do five minutes of programming? I know what I would choose.”

EMILY NUSSBAUM

THE FEE FIGHTERS

INSIDE A WISCONSIN CHURCH, the author of a book called *Pink Swastika* was arguing that homosexuals were highly influential in the rise of the German Nazi Party. Outside, hundreds of protesters, many of them University of Wis-

consin students, chanted, “Two, four, six, eight, we don’t need your Christian hate!” and “Bring back the lions!” It was a marketplace of ideas if ever there was one.

As a devout Christian, Scott Southworth was offended by

the protesters’ slogans. And as a University of Wisconsin law student, he considered them a violation of his free-speech rights. Like all Wisconsin students, Southworth had paid mandatory student-activity fees, a small portion of which went to fund the campus’s International Socialist Organization (ISO), whose banner flew at the church protest. This meant his money was helping to fund anti-Christian speech against his will. The First Amendment, he reasoned, not only guarantees your right to

say what you like; it also guarantees your right not to support speech that you don’t want to support. Southworth thought he had a case.

In April 1996, shortly before the church protest, Southworth and two co-plaintiffs filed suit against the Wisconsin Board of Regents. In addition to the ISO, the plaintiffs listed seventeen university organizations receiving student-activity fees that they found objectionable, including the Campus Women’s Center, Amnesty International, and the Lesbian,

Gay, Bisexual Campus Center. Last August, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit delivered an unprecedented ruling in the plaintiff's favor, holding that "forcing objecting students to fund objectionable organizations undermines [the First Amendment]." An appeal by the university will be heard by the Supreme Court in October.

Meanwhile, the educational community is taking sides. The American Council on Education's general counsel, Sheldon Steinbach, says his organization considers mandatory fees an appropriate means of guaranteeing a vibrant intellectual environment on public-university campuses. "To the extent that today's heresy is tomorrow's orthodoxy," says Steinbach, "there ought to be some measure of tolerance and openness—and breadth of exposure."

Southworth says he doesn't oppose a wide range of student speech and expression. He merely objects to being forced to fund points of view that contradict his conscience. "The university has admitted in court that it would force a black student to fund the KKK and that it would force a Jewish student to fund the neo-Nazis," he says. "It's a tyrannical policy that can be taken to definite extremes."

His rhetoric sounds hyperbolic, but legally, he may have a point. Southworth's case rests on precedents involving labor unions and state bar associations, which also levy required fees. In the past, the courts have ruled that such groups may not funnel objecting individuals' money into political activities not germane to their stated organizational purpose.

The Seventh Circuit agreed. But in the opinion of First Amendment scholar and former University of Wisconsin

president Robert O'Neil, the court gave "insufficient deference to the regents' judgment about the value of student political organizations as part of the educational process." The Seventh Circuit decision has also been criticized by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in its recent ruling on a similar University of Oregon student-fees case.

On the Wisconsin campus, student-government chair Eric Brakken fears a victory for Southworth in the Supreme Court could mean that debates on campus would be increasingly dependent on private-sector funding. To keep afloat, Brakken says, groups may be forced to appeal to—and appease—off-campus interests.

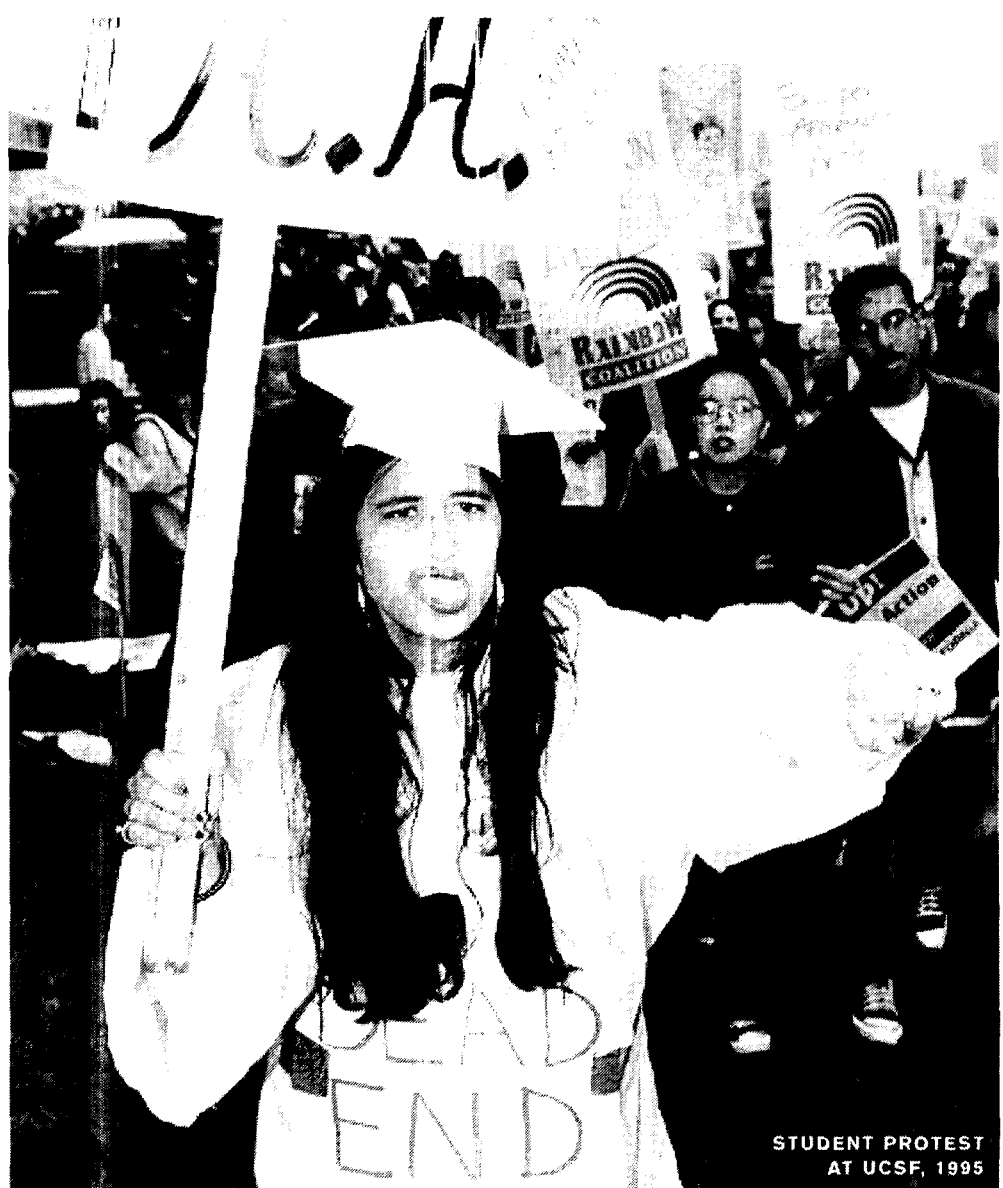
"It will be a real sad day in our universities when funding is determined by who is able to advertise themselves the best or who has the best name," he says.

But Southworth's defenders point out that only about a third of Wisconsin's six hundred student groups receive university funding anyway. And at the University of Minnesota, where a copycat case has emerged, plaintiffs say only about twenty groups are funded through student fees. "Why do we have compulsory subsidies in the first place?" asks Alan Sears, general counsel of the Alliance Defense Fund, the Christian legal organization paying for the Wisconsin and Minnesota suits. "Is it because these

This fall, the Supreme Court will decide whether student-activity fees are unconstitutional.

groups don't have a strong enough message to sell in the marketplace?"

Much of the disagreement here seems to stem from conflicting notions of how a university's agora—its proverbial marketplace of ideas—should work. Should universities institute subsidies financed by student fees to ensure that economics doesn't limit expression? Or should the mar-



STUDENT PROTEST
AT UCSF, 1995

ketplace of ideas be ruled by the law of supply and demand?

Southworth says if he wins, previously privileged groups may have to "raise money like the rest of us do, you know, bake sales, I don't know, hold a fund-raiser." Invoking the current liberal climate of college campuses, Southworth's lawyer, Jordan Lorence, disputes the notion that student fees protect minority viewpoints. "When you're funding the gay groups, the socialist group, the environmentalist group, the feminist group, you're basically reinforcing...the prevailing orthodoxies at the state university," he says. "These fees systems are not a form of affirmative action."

But Brakken counters that the range of student debate would suffer without mandatory fees. In two successive years, he points out, the Wisconsin student government

funded lectures by Ralph Reed and Ralph Nader.

Another sensitive issue in Southworth's suit concerns the definition of a political group. Southworth and his co-plaintiffs objected to the funding of Wisconsin's Campus Women's Center, for example, because a pro-choice article appeared in its newsletter. But senior Sarah Hillern, who works with the center, says the group takes no stand on abortion and would have printed a pro-life article had it received one. Can we really objectively distinguish between political and apolitical groups, or is Southworth's suit about enabling students to draw up personal hit lists of groups they want to see defunded?

Moreover, why stop with student-activity fees? What about tuition? If a student's tuition goes partly to subsidize the political advocacy of an outspoken professor or to

Southworth objected to funding the Campus Women's Center because a pro-choice article appeared in its newsletter.

a healthcare center providing abortion counseling, could the student sue his school? According to Georgetown law professor David Vladeck, who successfully defended the Oregon Student Public Interest Research Group's claim to student fees before the Ninth Circuit, Southworth's case "opens the Pandora's box."

If the Supreme Court affirms the Seventh Circuit ruling, it is unclear what type of policy universities will be forced to adopt.

Possibilities range from rebate and checkoff systems to abolishing student fees entirely. All are administratively daunting—and legally risky. For example, if universities were to do away with student fees and then raise tuition to fund student groups directly, Southworth warns they could find themselves in court. "I'd still sue them," he says. "And I'd still win."

Whatever the Court decides, *Board of Regents v. Southworth* has already—if inadvertently—enriched the marketplace of ideas at Wisconsin, where the case has been widely discussed and debated. "I think students are attracted here in part by the ferment of the political dialogue," says Associate Dean of Students Roger Howard. "And I think if Scott Southworth and his colleagues weren't raising hell from time to time, it would be a less exciting place."

CHRIS MOONEY

Women's Words...

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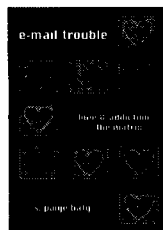
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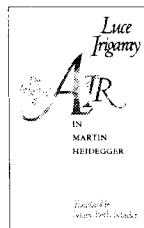
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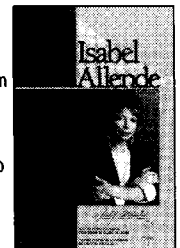
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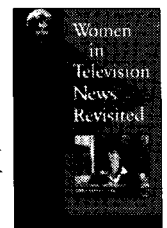
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BANNED IN CAIRO

LAST DECEMBER, SAMIA Mehrez was summoned to the president's office at the American University in Cairo (AUC), where she teaches a course on modern Arabic literature. Awaiting her arrival were several of the school's highest-ranking administrators, including its president, John Gerhart. Parents of three students, she was informed, had complained about a book on her syllabus.

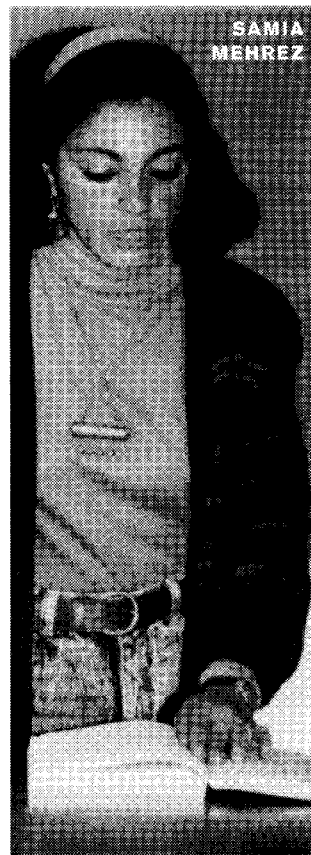
Mehrez was stunned. The book in question, a fictionalized autobiography by the Moroccan novelist Mohamed Choukri titled *For Bread Alone*,

is, she insists, "a moving and candid tale of an illiterate Moroccan child of the underclass who accedes to literacy at the age of twenty." But to the students in Mehrez's class, the memoir, which includes explicit accounts of the author's sexual encounters with men and with prostitutes, was pornography by another name. Moreover, Mehrez was told, the complainants were prepared to take the matter to the press if the university failed to take action. President Gerhart suggested that Mehrez apologize to her class "for any hurt that had been caused" and

refrain from using the book again. She declined, and the meeting concluded with Mehrez in doubt about her future within the Arabic studies department. "Since I'm tenured, I wasn't afraid I'd be fired," she says, "but I wondered if I'd disappear on an involuntary leave."

Five months later, Mehrez is still teaching, but what began as an intramural conflict over course content has become part of an ongoing, acrimonious debate over the meaning of academic freedom for an American university on Egyptian soil.

In January, the local press weighed in on the dispute. "What's nauseating in this case," said a columnist for the opposition Wafd Party's daily, "is the content of this book, which goes to revolting lengths in describing the sex act, the organs of men and women and other perversities. What's hap-



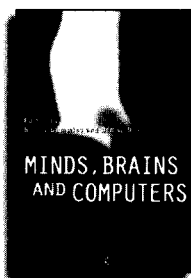
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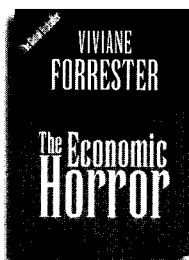
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pening in this course goes beyond the freedom of a professor or university and enters the realm of the slaughter of society's principles." At the same time, Mehrez's supporters in the United States inundated AUC with emails demanding that the university publicly defend the principle of academic freedom. As UC-Berkeley's Muhammad Siddiq put it in a message to President Gerhart, "We may, I hope, be forgiven the minor indulgence of wishing to preserve the few remaining corners in the vast Arab world where the Arab mind and imagination can crawl for shelter in these terrible times."

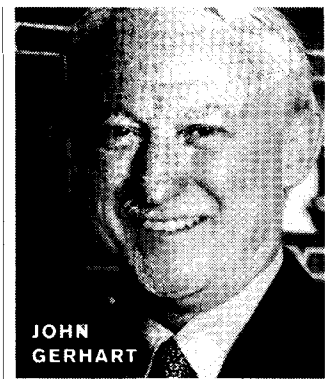
All this put President Gerhart in a tight spot. Branded an enemy of the people in the Egyptian press and an enemy of the Enlightenment by compatriots abroad, he found himself trying to appease all his

critics—and failing, apparently, to do so. In a January interview with a government newspaper, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, he admonished faculty to exercise "tact and judgment" in choosing texts to assign. And he commiserated with outraged parents: "I am sympathetic with the parents who are paying these huge fees and then the child comes home in tears and says, 'I have been given this book to read.' I was offended when I read it." Meanwhile, the president replied to Siddiq, "Please be assured that we also are concerned about keeping AUC a bastion of free thought." However, he added wryly, "It is easier to do that from the U.S. than here."

Egypt is hardly the most repressive country in the region, but it does not have a particularly strong record on civil liberties. The government

Gerhart was branded an enemy of the people in the Egyptian press and an enemy of the Enlightenment by compatriots abroad.

of President Hosni Mubarak cites security concerns in justifying both its bloody campaign against militant Islamists and the constraints imposed on opposition political parties, trade unions, and professional syndicates. In the meantime, the rise of a new middle class has given more provincial, conservative Egyptians a powerful voice in the nation's capital. The revealing costumes and risqué dialogue of Egyptian cinema of the 1960s, for exam-



JOHN GERHART

ple, could never appear on-screen today: The tastes of cautious domestic consumers would not countenance it. And despite a legal system that is officially secular, professors at state institutions have been sued for presenting dissertations and publishing books deemed sacrilegious by more conservative colleagues.

Now AUC itself is beginning to feel the effects of the conservative scourge. Founded by Americans in 1919, the uni-

THOMAS HARTWELL



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versity's mission was to provide an English-language liberal arts curriculum. Its constituency has long included the children of the wealthiest and most powerful Egyptians, but in the last decade, that constituency has undergone a perceptible shift in manners and morals.

Indeed, Mehrez's syllabus is not the first to come under scrutiny. Last May, when Maxime Rodinson's biography of the Prophet, *Mohammed*, was assigned in an introductory AUC course on Arab history, some students complained to alumni that the book was blasphemous. The matter came to the attention of a columnist at *Al-Ahram* who decried "the teaching of this book under the guise of freedom of thought and education." Less than twenty-four hours after the column appeared, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific

Research Moufid Shehab ordered the university to withdraw *Mohammed* from its curriculum and to retrieve all copies of the book already in circulation among its students.

Ironically, the book remained available at Cairo University and other state schools. But the incident seems to have attracted government attention to AUC's library and book store: According to university officials, the government has requested more than 450 of its books for review in the past ten months and banned approximately seventy. The state censor counters that the number of banned books is closer to four or five.

Meanwhile, for all the bluster, the fracas over *For Bread Alone* has resulted in neither a heroic defense of academic freedom nor a total capitulation. Mehrez's department toyed with the idea of restrict-

The Egyptian state censor has banned at least four books at the American University in Cairo.

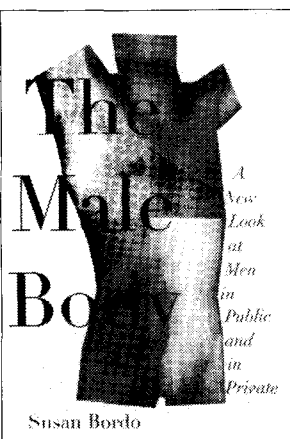
ing its curriculum to a list of forty pre-approved books. This measure was quickly defeated—but not before its adoption was mysteriously announced by the administration in a press release. To some faculty members, such events raise a frightening question: Will AUC faculty soon have to answer directly to an increasingly conservative public?

President Gerhart claims that outside forces are not exercising undue influence on the school. In conversations with higher education minister Shehab, he insists, he promised only that the tempest over *For*

Bread Alone was "being dealt with within the university." But Shehab evidently had his own ideas about what that meant when he addressed the AUC controversy before the education committee of the People's Assembly. A deputy on the committee asked women to leave the chamber before reading quotes from "a book whose place is in taverns and brothels, not an institution of learning." Shehab then assured the committee that following his conversation with Gerhart, he was confident that *For Bread Alone* would not be taught at AUC again and that the university would filter out offensive material henceforth.

For AUC, sighs one faculty member, such a promise would mean "sewing our own straitjacket and getting into it. Once you're in, there's no getting out."

JOSEPH LOGAN



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Breakthrough Books

WE ASKED SIX EXPERTS TO RECOMMEND THE BEST RECENT BOOKS ABOUT INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY IN A DIGITAL ERA.

Andrew L. Shapiro, fellow at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School and author of *The Control Revolution: How New Technology Is Putting Individuals in Charge and Changing the World We Know* (PublicAffairs/The Century Foundation, 1999 [www.controlrevolution.com]).

"Faced with the Internet's ability to be a giant copying machine, the publishing, music, and software industries are frantically trying to preserve control over their creative product. While some of this effort is legitimate, already there are signs that these culture brokers are trying to secure more protection—and profit—than traditional intellectual-property law would give them. Lawrence Lessig's *Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace* (Basic, forthcoming) is an indispensable guide to the new battles between technology and constitutional principles. Lessig, a pioneering cyberlaw scholar, explains how the familiar legal terrain of statutes and common law is giving way to a new form of private law-making through computer code. Though code regulation increasingly structures our social, political, and commercial life, Lessig warns that we haven't developed the tools—transparency, accountability, checks and balances—that will make it consistent with our democratic tradition. Another valuable book is James Boyle's *Shamans, Software, and Spleens: Law and the Con-*

struction of the Information Society (Harvard, 1996). Boyle shows how the romantic concept of the author has become a legitimizing myth for many dubious aspects of the information society, including the application of copyright protection to software (why should Bill Gates's Windows operating system receive the same protection as *The Great Gatsby*?) and the shrinking of the fair-use doctrine. At the same time, Boyle points to areas in which new intellectual-property rights may be needed—for example, to prevent corporate exploitation of human biology and indigenous cultural practices."

....

Paulina Borsook, author of *Cyberselfish: Technolibertarians and the True Revenge of the Nerds* (PublicAffairs, forthcoming).

"The current tension in intellectual property is between the forces of greater laxity and the forces for greater control. On the one hand, we see the spread of download-for-fun-and-for-free MP3 music technology; on the other hand, we see fewer but bigger record companies policing their properties as never before. *Fair Use: The Story of the Letter U and the Numeral 2* (Seeland, 1995), by the innovative rock band *Negativland*, documents the group's sampling of a U2 song—and subsequent struggles with the law, U2, and recording companies (including the band's own indie label,

SST). The book operates on two levels: as an art object (lots of great 'zine-type images included, as well as a CD) and as a casebook and cautionary tale for those who care about the freedom of artistic expression and the proper—and improper—uses of copyright."

....

Michael P. Ryan, professor of international business and government at Georgetown University and author of *Knowledge Diplomacy: Global Competition and the Politics of Intellectual Property* (Brookings Institution, 1998).

"What are the ground rules for producers of information 'content' in a digital age? In *Information Rules: A Strategic Guide to the Network Economy* (Harvard Business School, 1999), Carl Shapiro and Hal R. Varian explain that because the economics of information is characterized by costly production and cheap reproduction, content producers should do the following: Price according to consumer value and not production costs, differentiate their products and prices, increase their sales volumes, and protect their investment through copyright and other intellectual-property laws. At the same time, Shapiro and Varian caution that producers obsessed with guarding their intellectual property at all costs will miss opportunities to maximize that property's value. In the electronic realm, it seems, you sometimes need a teaser—you have to give a little intel-

lectual property away to get people to pay for the whole package. The information-industry authors gathered in **Derek Leebaert's** *The Future of the Electronic Marketplace* (MIT, 1998) predict that digitized information, instantly distributed, will revolutionize new-product development, buyer-supplier production chains, and the distribution of goods and services. Consumers will benefit most if in the near future their 'electronic agents' may retrieve information and conduct secure transactions in a digital marketplace."

....

David Kline, author of *Rembrandts in the Attic: Unlocking the Hidden Value of Patents* (Harvard Business School, forthcoming) and co-author of *Road Warriors: Dreams and Nightmares Along the Information Highway* (Dutton, 1995).

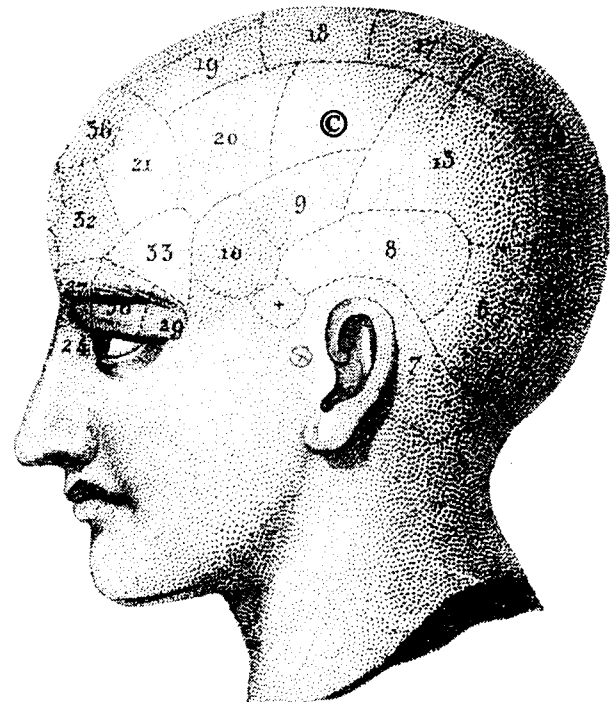
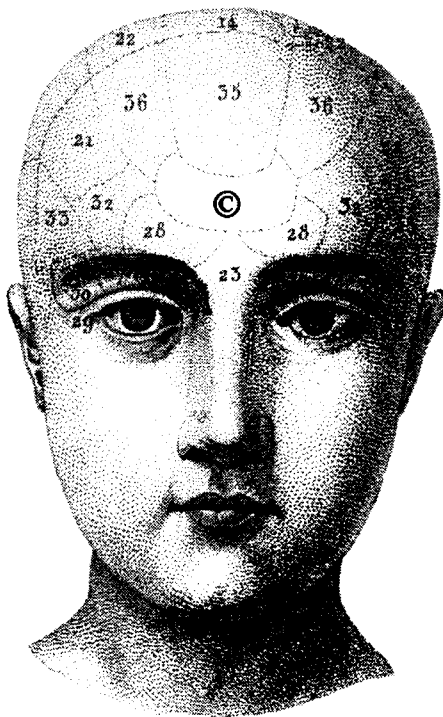
"These days, much of the debate about intellectual property is focused on the growing use of patents as competitive weapons in a high-tech, postindustrial economy. The arguments boil down to one fundamental question: Do patents help or hinder innovation? In *Owning the Future: Inside the Battles to Control the New Assets—Genes, Software, Databases, and Technological Know-How—That Make Up the Lifeblood of the New Economy* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999), **Seth Shulman** contends that granting patent rights to vital knowledge assets inevitably stifles innovation and

fosters monopolies that hoard scientific and medical discoveries. Unless society limits intellectual-property rights, Shulman insists, we face 'nothing less than an uncontrolled stampede to auction off our technological and cultural heritage...and the specter of an ominous descent into a new Dark Age.' That's pretty scary stuff. The only problem is that there's almost no evidence to support Shulman's dire prediction. This may seem counterintuitive—

film or a DNA sequence, displays a magnificently anti-proprietary character: Knockoffs are generally cheap to make and easy to share. For those who would make a business of information, these qualities entail what mainstream analysts call an 'appropriability problem.' How can private-property rights in information be constituted so as to make unauthorized copying illegal? Many experts have advocated strengthening worldwide

pressures exerted by transnational corporations and U.S. government agencies. The less-developed states have largely acquiesced to the Draconian new regime, but the issues remain far from settled, according to Susan K. Sell, in *Power and Ideas: North-South Politics of Intellectual Property and Antitrust* (SUNY, 1998), and Vandana Shiva, in *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (South End, 1997)."

from time to time promulgated intellectual-property laws based on Western models, but in practice these laws have meant little because, as Alford demonstrates, their culture and values are completely alien to the idea of intellectual property. This study is clearly relevant at a moment when something like a global intellectual-property regime for the digital age is emerging. Equally relevant is Rosemary Coombe's *The*



after all, patent holders are required by law to disclose information about their products to the public—and in sufficient detail that anyone skilled in the art at issue could reproduce the discovery."

....

Dan Schiller, professor of communications at the University of California at San Diego and author of *Digital Capitalism* (MIT, 1999).

"Information, whether it takes the form of a Hollywood

'trade-related intellectual-property rights' codes so that they cover a full range of new media. Despite his general support for these efforts, Michael P. Ryan, in *Knowledge Diplomacy: Global Competition and the Politics of Intellectual Property* (Brookings, 1998), concurs with the heterodox Ronald V. Bettig, author of *Copyrighting Culture: The Political Economy of Intellectual Property* (Westview, 1996), that international economic diplomacy has been marred by coercive

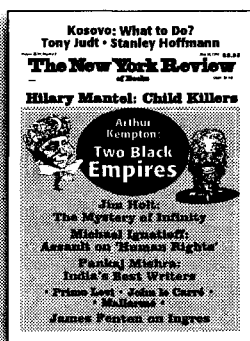
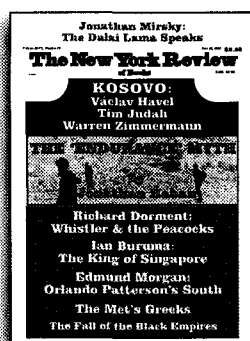
Mark Rose, professor of English at the University of California at Santa Barbara and author of *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Harvard, 1993).

"William P. Alford's *To Steal a Book Is an Elegant Offense: Intellectual Property Law in Chinese Civilization* (Stanford, 1995) presents a historical study of a civilization that has valued tradition and communality above innovation and individuality. Under pressure, the Chinese have

Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law (Duke, 1998). An anthropologist as well as a professor of law, Coombe looks at intellectual-property law as an active cultural force. She demonstrates the ubiquity of commodified cultural forms in our world today and speculates on the social and political consequences of the legal regime that nations such as the United States promulgate."

JOHN PALATTELLA

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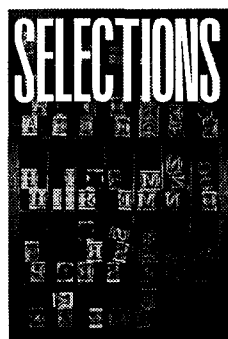
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InsidePublishing

TOMBSTONE BLUES

ON OCTOBER 26, 1881, WYATT EARP BECAME a gunfighting legend when he and his companions killed three cattle rustlers behind the O.K. Corral in Tombstone, Arizona. The magnitude of the event wasn't lost on Josephine Marcus, a Jewish stage performer who had come to Tombstone for a production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*—and who ended up becoming Wyatt's common-law wife. "Without stopping for a bonnet, I rushed outside and toward the sound of the firing before it died down," she later recalled. "It seemed to me in my panic that there must have been a hundred shots. Breathlessly I reached Fremont Street a block away and looked toward downtown.... A man in a wagon, whom I'd never seen before, yelled, 'Hop in, lady—I'll run you up to the excitement.'"

At least that's how Josephine puts it in her memoir, *I Married Wyatt Earp*. Published three decades after her death, the book relates Josephine's rise from boomtown actress in Arizona to prospector's wife in Alaska and California. The book, published by the University of Arizona Press in 1976, was an unexpected commercial success. Now in its twelfth printing, with thirty-five thousand copies sold, it is one of the press's all-time best-sellers. It's also been cited in subsequent Earp books like Paula Mitchell Marks's *And Die in the West* (Morrow, 1989) and in Richard Maxwell Brown's social history of frontier law, *No Duty to Retreat* (Oxford, 1991).

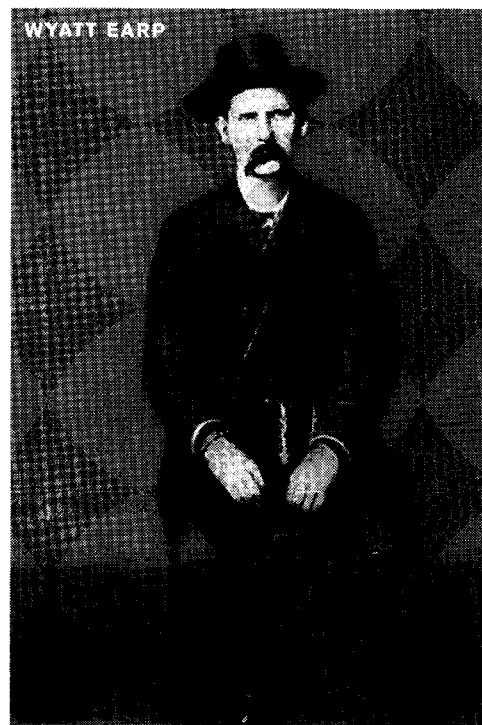
There's just one problem: Josephine never wrote most of the words in the memoir. Or so a number of historians now believe. They say that Glenn Boyer, the rancher and former military man who edited the book, took liberties with the manuscripts he claimed were his sources, and then filled gaps in the chronology with his own speculations. Boyer's critics don't mince words: "It's one big fake," says Allen Barra, a *Wall Street Journal* columnist and author of *Inventing Wyatt Earp: His Life and Many Legends* (Carroll & Graf, 1998). And Casey Tefertiller, the author of *Wyatt Earp: The Life Behind the Legend* (Wiley, 1997), concurs: "This may be the most remarkable literary hoax in American history. It has been believed

and accepted as the words of Josephine Earp for twenty-three years now."

Why did a scholarly press put its imprimatur on a work that might generously be called historical fiction? Though he has been portrayed in dozens of movies, a television series, and scores of books and magazine articles, Wyatt Earp has never generated much excitement among professors. When the O.K. Corral does emerge in academic literature, it's typically to illustrate the nature of federal law enforcement in frontier towns or the role of violence in Western culture. The question that obsesses most Earp buffs—who fired the first shot in the Tombstone gunfight?—barely registers with professional historians.

In the early 1970s, Boyer gave Arizona a chance to bridge the gap between the amateurs and the scholars: an Earp book with a larger documentary value. While undertaking a book-length analysis of the Earp legend in the late 1960s, Boyer interviewed and eventually befriended several of the Earps' living relatives. They surprised him by sending him a thick manuscript Josephine had put together with the help of two distant relatives, Mabel Earp Cason and Vinolia Earp Ackerman, before her death in 1944.

Unfortunately, the Cason manuscript, as it came to be called, did not pick up Josephine's story until *after* the Earps left Tombstone, omitting the family's most sensational anecdote. Arizona told him they would not publish without a Tombstone chapter, Boyer says. Accordingly, he produced a second manuscript, which he said Josephine had prepared between 1929 and 1932 with the help of John



Is Josephine
Earp's memoir of
her legendary
husband a hoax?

Clum, a former editor of the *Tombstone Epitaph* newspaper. Then, as Boyer explains in an epilogue to *I Married Wyatt Earp*, he “merg[ed] the two manuscripts, which contained vastly different materials presented in widely different styles.” To do so, he relied on interviews with Earp relatives and acquaintances to establish a “conversational standard for the combined first-person narrative.” The result was published by Arizona with the subtitle *Recollections of Josephine Sarah Marcus Earp*.

But Boyer’s critics say the second manuscript, sometimes referred to as the Clum manuscript, probably wasn’t much of a manuscript at all. Rather, it was Boyer’s shorthand for a whole collection of sources—notes, newspaper accounts, memorabilia, and the recollections of relatives—that he used to put together the Tombstone chapters. Then, they say, he wrote his own version of the history as if it were coming directly from Josephine, making several errors in the process.

For example, Boyer’s Josephine cites an article from the *Tombstone Weekly Nugget* of March 19, 1881—an article that smeared Earp’s friend Doc Holliday by implicating him in a botched stagecoach robbery. “Doc’s implication in this robbery through the propaganda of...the *Nugget*,” she writes, “led straight to the Earps’ shootout with the rustlers some six months later.” But when a skeptical Tefertiller scrutinized the *Nugget* microfiche, he found that no reference to Holliday existed. Further investigation suggested that Boyer had made a gaffe common to Earp researchers—lifting a fabricated version of the *Nugget* article from Billy Breakenridge’s 1928 *Helldorado*.

Complicating matters, a curious scholar cannot simply check the original source for verification. Boyer has said he lost the Clum manuscript years ago—possibly during a divorce. As for the Cason manuscript, it is part of Boyer’s large—and private—collection of Earp memorabilia, and he allows researchers virtually no access to those materials. (He does this, he says, to preserve the value of

the material for future collectors and to keep other historians from stealing his research.)

How did a book with such shaky sourcing make it through Arizona’s review process? Possibly because Arizona’s press director at the time wanted it to. According to correspondence unearthed by Tony Ortega, a reporter for the *Phoenix New Times*, an alternative weekly, editors at Arizona were concerned all along about the book’s veracity. But Marshall Townsend, then the press director, discouraged editors from challenging authors, and encouraged Boyer to put “more of yourself” into the work.

For his part, Boyer denies his book is a hoax and says he has been misunderstood. “My work is beginning to be recognized by all but a few fanatics and their puppets as a classic example of the newly recognized genre ‘creative non-fiction,’” he says. “That sort of thing may get history back into the door of respectability.” To be sure, he’s not the first person to employ a nontraditional literary device when writing about frontier lawmen or outlaws: The genre is rife with tall tales and self-conscious mythmaking, and plenty of those efforts show far less attention to real historical detail than *I Married Wyatt Earp*. Then again, such literature doesn’t typically win the imprimatur of an academic press.

Arizona’s interim press director, Christine Szuter, agrees that the provenance of the book “could be more clearly labeled.” But she says that the press will wait until the next edition before slapping on any warning signs. And though she says that Arizona now takes its scholarly review process more seriously than it did in the 1970s, she finds no reason to revisit old judgments or to apologize to scholars who were misled.

That attitude infuriates Casey Tefertiller. “At the same time they’re selling it as a history book by Josephine Earp,” he says, “they’re saying that this is not a history book. It’s just beyond belief.”

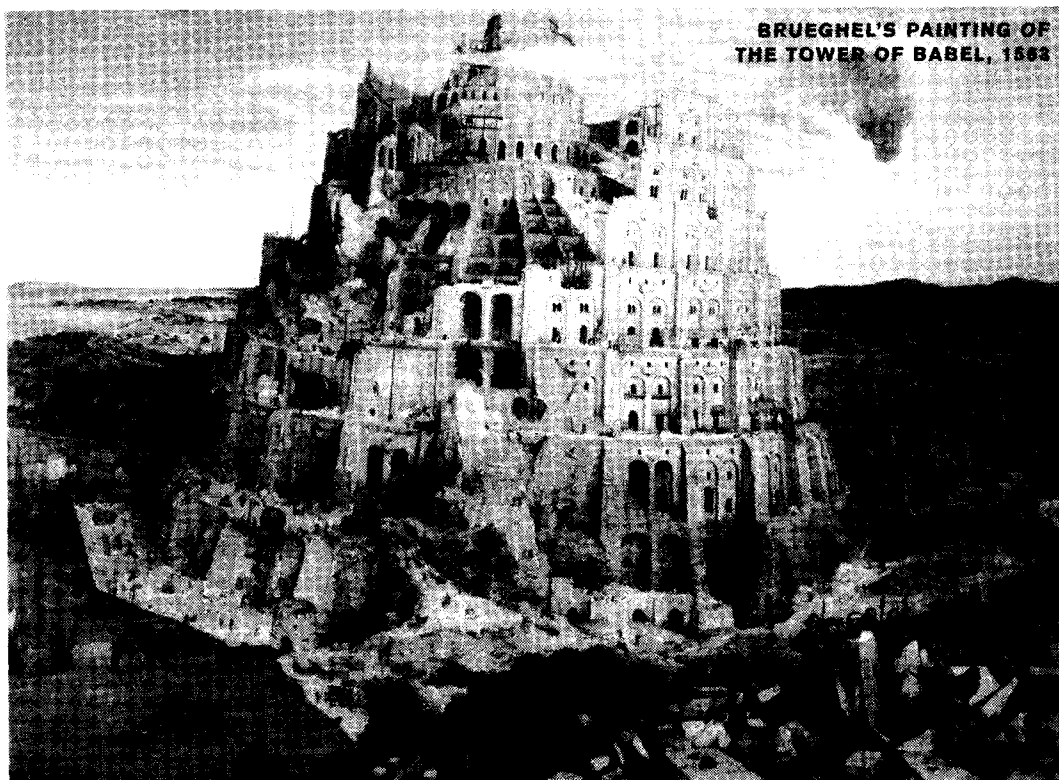
JEFFERSON DECKER

THE BUILDING INSTINCT

NOT SINCE DARWIN’S DAY HAS THERE BEEN SUCH a flurry of interest in applying the elegant insights of biology to the messy terrain of culture. From the raft of new titles in evolutionary psychology to popular business tomes revealing the caveman inside the manager, you can hardly make it through the aisles of Barnes & Noble without tripping over books seeking to explain the mysteries of human

experience in terms of genes, competitive reproductive strategies, and natural selection. There is even a theory that the “meme” provides a literal equivalent to genetic material in the realm of culture. The meme is a cultural unit—a tune, a farming technique, a joke, a magic spell, a best-seller, an attitude—that passes from person to person in competition with other memes for the space inside our heads. Memes have interests independent of their human hosts and spread or die in accordance with their relative environmental fitness. Culture, it turns out, is just nature in disguise.

How to think about the interplay of biology and culture in a way that doesn’t reduce one to



BRUEGHEL'S PAINTING OF
THE TOWER OF BABEL, 1563

the other? George Hersey's curious new book, *The Monumental Impulse: Architecture's Biological Roots* (MIT), abjures the meme and takes an altogether different approach, lining up a dazzling series of comparisons between architectural and biological forms and marveling at the likenesses. The connections aren't so much explained as illustrated. Hersey, a professor emeritus of art at Yale, calls his book "a giant slide show," gathering visual evidence not along the standard lines of art-historical influence but by considering uncanny resemblances between human constructions and those of the natural world.

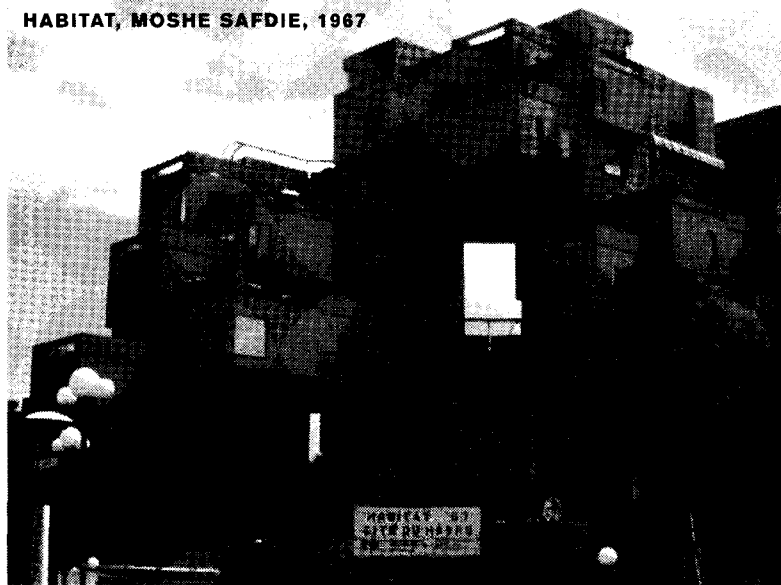
Some of these resemblances suggest human observation and imitation: The first hexagons our ancestors saw may well have been in honeycombs, and the first skyscrapers were likely to have been the termitaries of sub-Saharan Africa, where termites built cone-shaped dirt towers up to twelve feet high. Enterprising builders may well have known a good structural principle when they saw it, and made their own plans for human dwellings accordingly. But other connections in the book are far more mysterious—leaving the reader to guess at some hypothetical genetic mechanism that drives people to create structures in their own image. In a chapter about molecules, viruses, and cells, Hersey notes that the forms in Pieter Bruegel's painting *The Tower of Babel* look strikingly cellular; cells, he writes, "would impose their form and organization directly, from the actuality of the artist's living tissues. The hand, brain, and eye that imagined and painted the

The Tower of Babel themselves consisted of invisible but omnipresent tight packings of that city's shapes: a man made up of cells has painted a cell." Hersey goes on to suggest a kind of feed-back loop, musing that although cells helped shape Bruegel's painting, Bruegel's painting also may have helped shape our first visual renderings of cell tissue. But the trouble is that there is no reason to privilege cells over, say, fingerprints or stomach acids in the grand narrative of bio-architectural influence: The possibilities are entirely speculative, and likenesses remain correlations without cause.

Ultimately, Hersey argues that successful architectural forms reproduce themselves over time and that the urge to build may be itself genetic, stemming from our primitive strategies for territorial dominion and breeding. Architectural forms, he notes, often resemble human anatomy (phallic towers, breastlike domes). And the resemblance deepens: These constructions function as "attractors" just as sex organs do, drawing users and admirers to inhabit them. Such structures inspire imitation, thus guaranteeing the survival of their blueprints over time. And just as we evolved from single-celled organisms, so did architecture emerge from simplicity into complexity. The primitive

Hersey likens
the evolution of
architecture to the
evolution of life.

HABITAT, MOSHE SAFDIE, 1967



arch has sired the corbelled arch, the barrel vault, the cross vault, the pointed vault, and the ribbed vault, in a continuing hereditary process.

But even as he traces these genealogies, Hersey finesses the question of how deep the biological analogy runs. What does it actually mean to say that buildings “reproduce”? Perhaps architecture does mimic natural forms and processes—even reproductive processes—with great frequency, but this cannot in itself prove that buildings reproduce, nor does it explain what it would mean to say that they do. Indeed, when pressed, Hersey says that he does not truly believe buildings are alive in this sense, but rather that people tend to perceive them this way. The habit of seeing living

forms and life itself in the “reach” of a spire (or the “arms” of a chair) has led him to play out the possibilities of a “living architecture” without quite committing to a theory of it.

In fact, Hersey eschews the reproducing meme and all the theoretical support this quasi-biological entity might lend to a project like his own: “As Coleridge said about something else entirely, memes explain much too much, such that they explain nothing”—an apt criticism. If he stops short of revealing the mechanisms behind his correspondences, he does so in the spirit of primary research: to inspire others to finish the job.

When I was little, one of my favorite books was called *The Wump World*. It is a classic lefty tale of rabid urban capitalism steadily destroying the habitat of a peaceful band of herbivores (the eponymous “wumps”). Encroaching skyscrapers eat up the countryside until the last patch of grass has been paved over, leaving the poor wumps to languish underground. One day, a violent cataclysm erupts above. Suddenly the roar of the city is quiet, the cement gradually crumbles, and the wumps make their way back to fledgling meadows in the rubble. In many ways, my understanding of architecture has been colored by this story: Buildings represent attempts to tame or displace the natural world, and I-beams are forever at odds with trees. But Hersey’s book opens up a different prospect—one in which architecture is intimately tied to our biological selves and surroundings, as both an expression of them and an attempt to mirror their glory. It is a project in its early stages but one that may lead to a subtler convergence than either memes or wumps can provide.

ALISON DEMOS

GOOD CITATIONS

BACK IN 1994, JANICE WALKER HAD A DILEMMA. She was writing a scholarly paper about on-line human interaction, and a good chunk of her research had been conducted at the Netoric’s Tuesday Café, a well-known on-line salon where academics would gather for real-time chat. Walker, a Ph.D. student at the University of South Florida, had logged reams of the chat and quoted it liberally in her paper. The question was how to cite this stuff in her bibliography. Technically speaking, it didn’t exist anywhere, except in cyberspace. “What the heck *was* it?” she asked. “A document? A book? An interview?”

The art of citation has always had its own peculiar rules. But thanks to the Internet, citation has recently become a confused and contentious quagmire. Books and articles generally obey the centuries-old author-and-title paradigm; home pages frequently don’t. Worse, how do you deal with a fifteen-thousand-word Web document that doesn’t have any page numbers? What’s the proper way to identify a news-group posting authored by someone who calls herself DemonSeed? And who precisely is the publisher?

To stem the chaos, style setters have begun to weigh in. The most brazen and Net-savvy is Walker herself, who last fall authored *The Columbia Guide to Online Style* (Columbia)—a culmination of four years spent hacking out standards on her own. After discovering in 1994 that the *MLA Handbook* was silent on the topic of on-line sources, she decided to create her own rules. The goal, she figured, was to emulate the MLA’s principles—to describe a source as economically as possible,

while ensuring that readers have enough information to find it themselves.

The pros and cons of on-line documents quickly became apparent. The obvious pro, Walker notes, is that the citation can deliver the original document itself. A Web address or URL—though long and ugly to read—is more efficient in providing instant access than the traditional title-and-author combination. Beyond that, though, the mutability of on-line documents throws normal citation rules for a loop.

Case in point: vanishing documents. If you cite *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, you can be confident that, even though obscure, the tract will be somewhere, in some library, for others to find. But, as anyone who's faced the dreaded "Error 404 Page Not Found" message knows, on-line documents frequently disappear without a trace. Future scholars, attempting to follow your meticulous bibliography, might find themselves staring into the empty ether, where your primary source material once lay. At that point, it becomes a matter of trust: Who's to say that page ever existed in the first place? Hey, are you calling me a *liar*?

Walker's solution was to concede defeat elegantly. According to her system, you cite the date a document was created (if you can find it), as well as the date that you last accessed it. If the document vanishes later, well, that's just too bad for the reader. "All you can attest to is that it was there when you came by," Walker says firmly. "You can't do any better." In general, she argues, the benefits of using on-line material outweigh the risks. "If you specialize in on-line issues, sometimes you've just got to cite someone's room in an on-line salon. You can't ignore the material, no matter how awkward it might be to locate it. You have to cite what's out there."

Predictably, these types of existential issues have unsettled the more traditional style setters. The 1999 *MLA Handbook* came to largely the same conclusions as Walker did on citation standards. (It also recommends printing out a copy of any Web page you suspect might vanish.) In general, though, the *Handbook* editors remain nervously mistrustful of on-line sources—betraying far more comfort with, as they put it, the "six-hundred-year-old print era." Indeed, whenever it discusses on-line documents, the guide becomes curiously stilted, like bewildered parents attempting to talk to their kids about video games. (It refers, in one delicious passage, to "the popular Internet service known as the World Wide Web.")

MLA editors would not necessarily deny the charge of excessive caution. The citation of on-line documents prompted more soul-searching than they'd expected, says Phyllis Franklin, the MLA's executive director. "It forced us to deal with the most basic question, like, 'Why *do* you

need to find things?' Do we necessarily need to be able to find something someone else read?"

The whole point of scholarship, for the MLA, is to judge the authority of documents—so it's better to be safe than sorry, and to exclude where doubtful. "It's particularly important for students to be careful," Franklin notes. "They're still learning how to evaluate sources." Though they offer ways to cite fleeting, synchronous communications such as chat groups, MLA editors inveigh against them: "[E]mail discussion lists and 'chat rooms' are helpful for sharing ideas but, except for rare occasions, are not deemed acceptable resources for research papers."

With issues this complex, it's unsurprising that tensions run high among the mavens of on-line style. Walker takes particular glee in skewering the less Net-savvy advice of her competitors. One sore point, for example, is the MLA's use of the humble angle bracket. The MLA recommends putting angle brackets around a URL, to separate it from the period at the end of a sentence—as in `<http://www.linguafranca.com>`. Otherwise, a reader might errantly assume the period is part of the URL.

But, as Walker points out, the latest versions of Microsoft Word automatically convert a Web address into a hot link and actually *delete* the angle brackets. Thus with up-to-date software, it is technologically impossible to follow MLA style. Sure, you can turn off that feature if you fiddle with the program's preferences—but most of us have enough trouble figuring out how to turn our computers *on*. "The problem is that the MLA is still looking at a document as if we all wrote on typewriters," Walker argues. "They clearly don't have any idea what it's like to be working with this technology all day long."

On one point, however, everyone agrees: Since even annually updated style guides can't keep up with the warp-speed pace of developments on the Web, any citations standards will quickly become obsolete. "That's just a hazard of publishing in this area," Franklin notes. Such was the fate of *Electronic Style*, the on-line style guide published in 1993, and updated in 1996, by University of Vermont reference librarians Xia Li and Nancy Crane. Their first edition didn't even mention the Web and thus became almost immediately irrelevant. The second edition was more ambitious but risks obsolescence today.

"We have no plans to update it now," Crane says wearily. "Let everyone else figure it out."

How does a scholar
cite a news-group
posting authored by
someone who calls
herself DemonSeed?

CLIVE THOMPSON

UNBOUND!

DESPITE THE THREATS AND THE PROMISES, NO Web site or e-book has yet managed to displace the old ink-and-paper monograph. But when it comes to the encyclopedia, it's hardly controversial to assert that extensive cross-referencing and ease of searching—the strong suits of digital media—outweigh the benefits of propping the “content” up on your lap and getting lost in it for a few hours. More and more reference books are migrating to the Internet. Some, like Oxford's *American National Biography*, are print books with digital afterlives; others, like the *MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences*, actually use the Web as an incubator for a conventional print volume.

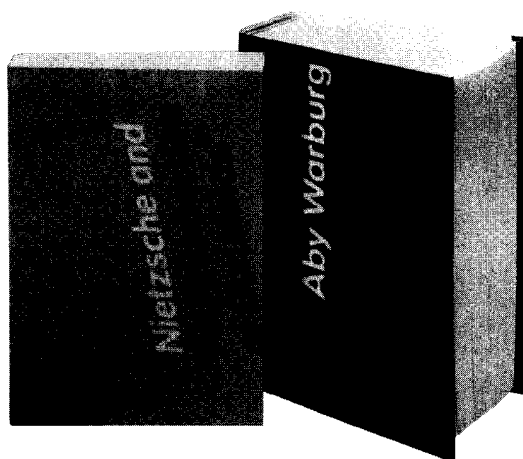
Oxford's ambitious *American National Biography* (ANB) was the product of a decade of scholarly labor. Upon publication last January—twenty-four volumes, 17,500 entries—it was hailed by a librarians' group as the best reference work of 1998 and by UCLA historian Joyce Appleby as a “once-in-a-lifetime publishing project.” But unlike previous biographical projects on this scale, the ANB probably won't issue updates in supplemental volumes every few years. Instead, by January its contents will be posted on the Web

(www.oup-usa.org/anb) and embellished with one thousand illustrations unique to the on-line edition. From then on, a team at Oxford will post 100 to 250 new entries every three months.

Eventually, the ANB may leave its print roots entirely behind, predicts Marc Carnes, a professor of history at Barnard College who served as general editor of the project, along with John A. Garraty, a professor emeritus at Columbia. “I think this may be the last huge enterprise like this where the primary publication format is to be printed volumes,” Carnes says. “I hope it will last well into the twenty-first century, but when it is redone it will be redone in electronic format—primarily and perhaps exclusively.”

The *American National Biography* is the scholarly offspring of Scribner's *Dictionary of American Biography* (DAB), whose original twenty volumes were issued in the 1920s and 1930s and whose supplements kept on coming for years thereafter—ten of them, stretching into the 1990s. The ANB's delivery was not painless, however. Several years ago, Garraty, who served as editor or co-editor of supplements 4 through 8 of the old dictionary, told Scribner's that the original volumes were hopelessly dated in style and content. Scribner's balked at revamping the entire set. At that point, Garraty persuaded the American Council of

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Learned Societies (ACLS), which holds the copyright to the series, to turn to Oxford, which has a strong record of reference publishing.

Then a whirlwind of corporate takeovers struck. Macmillan bought Scribner's. Paramount took over Macmillan. Viacom acquired Paramount. When the dust settled, Macmillan decided that an updated DAB wasn't such a bad idea after all, especially given the possibilities of electronic publishing. Too late, said the ACLS—we already signed up with Oxford. When Macmillan insisted on pushing forward with the project, the ACLS sued, claiming copyright infringement. The suit was settled in 1997. Although the terms were undisclosed, the upshot is that Macmillan can't use the name *Dictionary of American Biography* on any new product. "It was an ugly undertaking," says the ACLS's Steven Wheatley, summing up the affair.

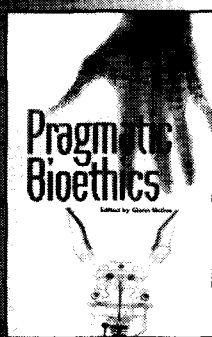
So how musty and male-centered *was* the old DAB? It deemed Abigail Adams unworthy of an entry. For the new ANB, hundreds of now-forgotten small-town politicians and religious leaders had to be cleared out to make room for Sojourner Truth, Martha Ballard (the heroine of Laurel Ulrich's Pulitzer-winning *A Midwife's Tale*), and Bugsy Siegel. Pop culture gets a belated nod, with Frank Zappa taking a bow. One thing hasn't changed: As with the old DAB, you still have to be dead to get in.

While Oxford adapted a print volume to the Web, MIT has chosen the opposite course. Gestated on the Web, the *MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences* (MITECS) will mature into hard copy. MIT's single-volume guide is a pioneering effort to synthesize the disparate strands of this three-decade-old cross-disciplinary field. "The goal was to provide very accessible short overviews on as many topics as we could bind between two covers," says Amy Brand, an executive editor at MIT. Edited by Frank Keil, a professor of psychology at Yale, and Robert A. Wilson, an associate professor of philosophy at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the 964-page encyclopedia spans the discipline's five subfields—philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, computational intelligence, and linguistics—and attracted some marquee names. Ned Block provided an entry on semantics, Patricia



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By January, the contents of the American National Biography will be posted on the Web.

Kitcher wrote on Freud, and Stuart Zola examined animal memory.

The essays were initially brought together on a Web site (<http://mitpress.mit.edu/MITECS/>) as a sort of working galley, so that the four hundred-plus

contributors could get a sense of what their colleagues were doing, offer suggestions, and avoid overlap. But the site attracted interlopers. In response, MIT set up a free-registration system, which has logged more than sixteen thousand visitors. "We have an on-line cognitive-science community that has grown out of this," MIT's Brand says. But that community will soon be changing shape. When the printed book comes out in

June, the free part of the site will be scaled back to abstracts. Only those who own the hard copy will have access to the complete digital edition, which will include hyperlinked crossreferences.

Meanwhile, MIT hopes to keep the cognitive-science community talking on a more permanent and far-reaching site: Now in prototype

form, Cognet (<http://cognet.mit.edu>) offers searchable versions not only of the encyclopedia but also of key journals like *Linguistic Inquiry* and *Neural Computation*. The site profiles existing cognitive science degree programs, spreads the word about forthcoming books, and fosters on-line debate about pressing issues in the field. In Hotscience, a special feature on the Web site, the press posts provocative editorial essays followed by reader commentary.

One recent Hotscience piece argued that language may have developed in part as a by-product of the human brain's evolving ability to detect society's freeloaders. Scientifically speaking, that's hardly a settled issue. But as it turns out, freeloaders are very much on the MIT Press's mind. Like MITECS, Cognet is free only temporarily. The press is still working out a tiered pricing system that will lure scholars to the site—without bleeding sales revenue from existing books and journals.

Freeloaders are less of an issue for Oxford, which will offer libraries site licenses for the ANB, with the price pegged to the number of expected users. Of course, readers with more than \$2,500 to spare will also be able to enjoy both the hard-back volumes and unlimited surfing privileges.

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THE ATTACK OF THE INCREDIBLE GRADING MACHINE

BY CLIVE THOMPSON

Darrell Laham, Peter Foltz, and Thomas Landauer got up early on April 16, 1998, and found their work cited on the front page of *USA Today*. SOFTWARE MAKES THE GRADE ON ESSAYS, blared the headline. The article went on to discuss the psychologists' Intelligent Essay Assessor (IEA), a computer program that attempts to judge essays by analyzing statistical patterns in word usage. More to the point, as *USA Today* breathlessly noted, the program can actually grade papers, conferring marks that closely match the average professor's.

Laham, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Colorado, Foltz, a professor at New Mexico State University, and their intellectual mentor Thomas Landauer, also a professor at Colorado, had spent almost ten years improving the word-crunching method behind the software. They had tested it on two thousand student essays. And the day the story appeared in *USA Today*, they were in San Diego to present their findings at a meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA).

They almost didn't make it to the meeting. "The phone started ringing in our hotel room," Laham recalls. Reporters from Dallas and Dayton, London and Toronto, jammed the phone lines. "It was just crazy," Laham says. "We spent most of the day in the pressroom. We barely got down to give the talk in time." The media inquiries didn't let up until two o'clock the next morning. Everyone had the same questions: What did this mean for education? Would teaching assistants become obsolete? Would professors stop grading papers altogether?

Few scenarios provoke more hysteria than the one in which the machines take over, especially when it involves machines' replicating the arguably unique human capacity for language and thought. Not that such anxieties have kept us from trying to build smart machines; on the contrary, researchers have tried for decades to produce essay-grading software. But few have claimed the success that Landauer and his colleagues have—and none has applied such unorthodox assumptions.

Traditionally, computer techniques for analyzing written language relied on grammar and syntax. Since the 1960s, programmers have been designing software that searched for familiar features of good writing, such as sentence length, spelling, and the rhetorical signposts of argumentation—words like "might," "therefore," or "however." The goal was to get computers to "read" texts with the aid of dictionaries, spell checks, and grammar software. Most of these efforts have been disappointing.

But the technique Landauer came up with is an altogether different beast. His software completely ignores style, grammar, and syntax. In fact, it relies on none of the familiar rules of language at all. It concerns itself solely with the following question: Does the student's essay use words appropriate to the subject

matter? To answer this question, Landauer's software performs a series of operations. First, it assembles a customized database of texts on the assigned topic. It measures the *spatial* relationships among all the words in these texts, noting where each word appears and which other words it is near. The software then performs a similar analysis on the student essay. Finally, it compares the student essay with the texts in its database. The theory behind the method is this: For any given essay, good content is a function of using certain words in the vicinity of certain other words, and that accomplishment can be expressed numerically.

It sounds too complicated (or too simple) to be any good, but Landauer and his team claim their program can crank out grades as accurately as any professor. Indeed, flushed with the success of their experimental results, the psychologists have formed a company—Knowledge Analysis Technologies—to market their tool to schools. They have already signed up a professor at Florida State University to test drive the grading machine in his classroom next fall.

But cornering the instructional technology market is just part of the plan. When it comes to making an intellectual impact, the psychology professors' ambitions are grander still. The ideas behind IEA, its inventors claim, provide nothing less than a revolutionary insight into the mysteries of human thought. Declaring that their software "can offer a close enough approximation to people's knowledge to underwrite theories and tests of theories of cognition," the psychologists argue that their invention "constitutes a fundamental computational theory of the acquisition and representation of knowledge." If Landauer's software can evaluate texts by identifying statistical patterns of word usage, could it be that humans make sense of language in a similar—purely statistical—way? What if our brains are nothing more than extremely powerful number crunchers?

This is a radical notion, and not everyone is buying it. Linguists and philosophers in particular remain deeply skeptical. Landauer and his team want us to think of their software's "knowledge of the world [as] analogous to a well-read nun's knowledge of sex." But that means that much of what the linguists have taught us about how language works—especially

about the importance of syntax and grammar—is wrong. Are the linguists mistaken? Or are IEA's inventors—on this issue at least—wildly off the mark?



LANDAUER, SIXTY-SEVEN, IS AN UNLIKELY revolutionary. Most of his career has been devoted to small, focused problems rather than big theories. "I start with the practice first," he says, "then work my way out." The project that evolved into his essay-grading software began in the mid-1980s, out of a seemingly mundane question: Why are computers so hard to use? At the time, personal computers were just beginning to catch on, and Landauer—a Harvard Ph.D.—was working for Bell Labs, heading up the company's cognitive-science division. For a research scientist, Bell was a fairly delirious place to work; projects were wide-ranging and not necessarily focused on the bottom line, a luxury that many universities could not afford. When Landauer decided to look into the interaction of humans and computers, it was still a relatively new field. "No one," says Landauer, "was asking why people found computers so difficult." The software creators didn't realize there was a problem; they thought computers were *supposed* to be hard.

Landauer's team began conducting tests on computer users. They discovered that user confusion was almost always a matter of language. Computer commands were often unintuitive. For example, the command for listing files was typically "DIR," an abbreviation for "directory." Users would often forget this term, trying more intuitive words like "list" instead. But "list" didn't work, of course, and frustrated users were all too often inclined to give up. "People were literally quitting Bell because UNIX"—a common operating system for mainframe computers—"was such a nightmare," Landauer notes.

Computerized search engines posed similar problems. Anyone who's used a computerized database knows the hair-pulling frustration of keyword searches. Even a finely honed search can often fail to produce a worthwhile document because you're not using quite the right keyword. In information-retrieval circles, this is referred to as the synonymity problem. A colleague of Landauer's at Bell Labs offers

an example: “Say I’m looking for articles on man-machine interaction. If there’s a paper on human-computer interaction, I’m not going to find it, even though they’re dealing with the same concepts.”

Synonyms, of course, are a basic feature of language. Different people use different words to say the same thing. And the same person is likely to use different words to say the same thing on different occasions. We do this without thinking, unconsciously selecting synonyms, effortlessly substituting one idiomatic expression for another. But computers are helpless at this task. A computer has to match one keyword to another precisely; it can’t determine that man-machine is saying the same thing, generally, as human-computer. In the late 1980s, Landauer’s team began the hunt for a way around this problem. “We needed a system that would learn automatically what words were related to each other,” Landauer says. “It was an issue of semantics.”

Within a year, his research team had developed an intriguing solution. Employing a complex mathematical technique, they were able to examine how every single word in a given body of texts is related to every other word in the texts—and express those relationships numerically. This technique involved taking a handful of texts on a particular topic and creating a “semantic space” out of their words. An elaborate, multidimensional model, the semantic space is difficult to visualize. But you could think of it this way: In a simple two-dimensional grid, a point is represented by two numbers, its x and y coordinates. In Landauer’s semantic space, a word is plotted in three hundred or more dimensions simultaneously. By comparing the strings of coordinate values for two words, you can theoretically tell how related they are—how likely they are to appear together in a sentence or a text—on a scale of 1.0 to -1.0. If the values for two words are nearly 1.0 apart, the words are virtually identical; if they’re -1.0 apart, chances are they will never appear in the same text.

Language, Landauer’s team argued, is fundamentally a matter of such statistics. Any word we know is *potentially* related to any other—it’s just a matter of how likely or unlikely the two words are to be used in the same context. The average writer, for example, would rarely use “taxi” and “strip-mining” in the same sentence; in contrast, “strip-mining” and “copper” would have a far more intimate relationship. It doesn’t

mean that “taxi” and “copper” are utterly unrelated—they’re just *distantly* related in the writer’s semantic universe. Over a lifetime of seeing and reading words, Landauer argues, our tacit knowledge of these relationships enables us to determine the meaning of words and sentences. In his analysis, word order in a given sentence or text doesn’t matter; merely by appearing in close proximity, a significant relationship between words is established.

Landauer’s team dubbed their technique Latent Semantic Analysis (LSA), a name that refers to the hidden connections they believe create meaning in a given document.

Early results obtained with LSA exceeded the researchers’ expectations. The software demonstrated an uncanny ability to emulate certain aspects of human reading comprehension. In the early 1990s, Landauer and a colleague created a massive semantic space by crunching 4.6 million words—roughly to the amount of text a student would have read by the time he or she reached the eighth grade—from entries in the *Grolier’s Academic American Encyclopedia*. The space took up five hundred megabytes of their computer’s memory, an enormous amount at the time.

When the LSA space was ready, the researchers fed it a synonym test that was part of the Test of English as a Foreign Language offered by the Educational Testing Service. Each question poses a word or phrase and asks the testee to pick the closest match from among four other words. LSA scored 65 percent. Not perfect, but still, the researchers were delighted to note, this was the average score for non-English-speaking college applicants. “We could’ve gotten it into college,” Landauer laughs.



AFTER THIS SUCCESS, REMARKABLE THINGS began to happen. As his team experimented with the encyclopedia-based semantic space, he says, the program became even more—to use his word—“humanlike.” In addition to picking out synonyms, the researchers discovered that LSA could make correct inferences about sentences it had never encountered before.

Consider the following sentence: “The player caught the high fly to left field.” No single word in the sentence actually men-

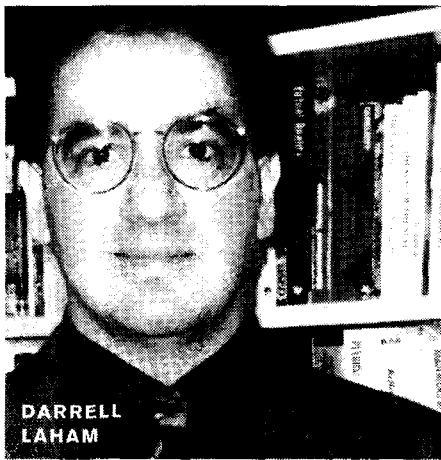
tions the game of baseball. The referent is merely implied. Yet when Landauer and a colleague analyzed the sentence using their encyclopedia LSA space, the software seemed to recognize the implicit—but entirely absent—subject. LSA noted that the words “ball,” “baseball,” and “hit” were all closely related to the sentence. “Ball” was rated 0.37 in similarity to the sentence; “baseball” received 0.31; “hit” got 0.27—all relatively close occurrences.

Equally astonishing to the researchers, LSA could accurately determine that other words *weren’t* closely related to the sentence. Consider the word “fly” as it appears in the phrase “high fly.” “Zipper,” of course, is a synonym for “fly” when we’re talking about a pair of pants. But LSA rated “zipper” merely a 0.03. In other words, it signaled that in a sentence about baseball, the word “fly” did not mean “zipper.” “Insect,” another potential word relative, scored just 0.17. “Airplane” got only 0.18.

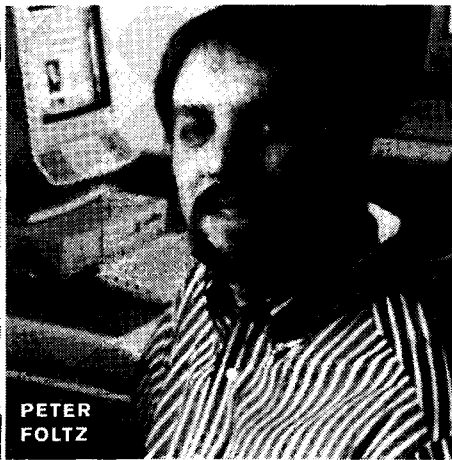
No previous computer technique had gone this far. LSA could apprehend a close relationship between any two sentences in a text, even if they had no words in common. And it did so without recourse to preprogrammed dictionaries or grammars. In a 1997 paper on LSA, Landauer and a co-author invoked the “magical appearance of its performance.”

Quantifying relationships between individual words and sentences is one thing; grading essays is another. Or is it? By the mid-1990s, Landauer’s LSA project had piqued the interest of several younger researchers, including Peter Foltz. While a graduate student in psychology at the University of Colorado, Foltz spent a year as a research intern at Bellcore, the successor to Bell Labs after the breakup of AT&T. There, Foltz met Landauer and began learning about LSA. At the end of the year, Foltz returned to Boulder to finish his doctorate. Landauer, coincidentally, moved there, too, after obtaining a teaching position in the university’s psychology department.

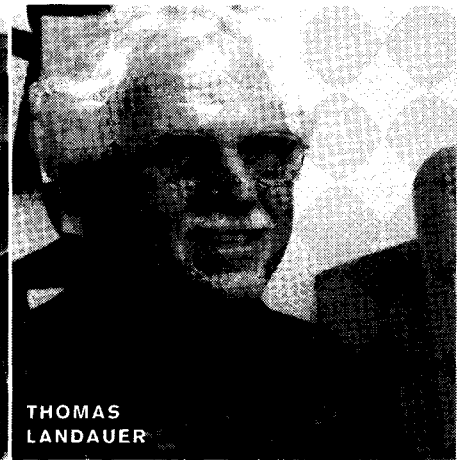
Back at school, Foltz became increasingly interested in finding practical applications for LSA. At a rudimentary level, Foltz believed, the principle behind LSA is the same as that an instructor uses to grade a student essay. In theory, he argued, the more information a student extracts from a textbook, the more his or her writing will resemble—at least in factual content—that original text.



DARRELL
LAHAM



PETER
FOLTZ



THOMAS
LANDAUER

IGNORING SYNTAX AND GRAMMAR, THE TEAM'S SOFTWARE NONETHELESS SHOWED AN UNCANNY ABILITY TO EMULATE HUMAN READING COMPREHENSION.

This is particularly true for the humble short-essay answer, where factual information is at a premium and where opportunities for stylistic embellishment—metaphor, simile, analogy—are often at a minimum. With the short-essay answer, Foltz concluded, a teacher isn't looking for inspired prose, just some evidence that the student has mastered the subject. Could LSA tell if this was the case?

Foltz decided to conduct an experiment. After finishing his Ph.D., he received a postdoctoral appointment at the University of Pittsburgh. There, he collected a handful of short essays that Pittsburgh history students had written in response to the question "To what extent was the U.S. intervention in Panama justified?" Before writing the essays, the students had read twenty-one short history texts on the subject, a total of 6,097 words. Foltz took those texts and used them to create an LSA space. Then he added an additional 4,800 words from encyclopedia entries and 17,000 words from other books on the topic. Satisfied that the LSA space was fully "trained" on the subject of Panama, Foltz set it to work on the papers, allowing LSA to make comparisons.

The process worked like this: To grade the essays, Foltz compared each, sentence by sentence, with the LSA space. Since LSA looks for semantic similarity, not identity, it didn't matter if the students' wordings diverged from the original texts. A sentence with high content about Panama would receive a high score, no matter how it was

phrased. To determine the final mark for the paper, Foltz calculated the average of the similarity markings for each sentence. The highest average correlations got As, the slightly lower ones got Bs, and so on.

The central risk of this approach, Foltz admitted later, was that plagiarism would be lavishly rewarded: If a student repeated an original source text verbatim, LSA would give the essay a high score. One could raise another, more profound objection: The test question required the students to make a persuasive judgment about the Panama invasion based on their readings, but LSA could assess merely the presence of relevant information, not the strength and coherence of an argument.

Despite these weaknesses, Foltz suspected LSA's grades could match those of human graders. To find out, he hired four history graduate students and had them mark the essays, too. When he compared the human- and computer-generated grades, the results were impressive: LSA approximated the human graders. It wasn't a perfect match; in many cases, the LSA grades differed greatly from those given by a human. But then again, the human graders didn't always agree with each other either. On average, LSA produced grades that agreed almost as often with the humans as the humans agreed among themselves. Thus, LSA passed computer science's celebrated Turing test: A machine can be considered intelligent if its behavior is indistinguishable from that of a human.

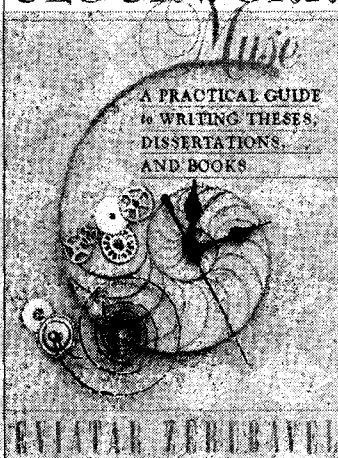
In other words, the point behind an automatic grading system is not to grade perfectly; it's to grade as well as a human.

Nonetheless, Foltz wasn't satisfied with LSA's performance. LSA was almost as good as a human grader but not quite, and Foltz thought he knew how to improve it. He had the four graduate-student graders comb through the Panama reading materials and pick ten sentences that they felt imparted the most essential information on the topic. The LSA space then graded the student essays based on how closely they matched the content of those ten sentences alone. As Foltz noted, the ten sentences represented the material that the graders regarded as most important, the content of an ideal answer to the Panama question. Foltz figured that human graders are looking—consciously or unconsciously—for very specific information. By having the graders identify their preferred content, Foltz could train the LSA space to look for that material, too.

Foltz's assumptions were right. By basing its marks on the ten sentences, LSA's scoring results were even closer to the humans'. In fact, this time LSA slightly outperformed its human counterparts, agreeing with the human graders more closely than they agreed with each other. LSA, it appeared, was hitting a golden mean that the human graders wandered around but seldom found. When Landauer learned of Foltz's results, he was initially surprised; later, he thought they actually

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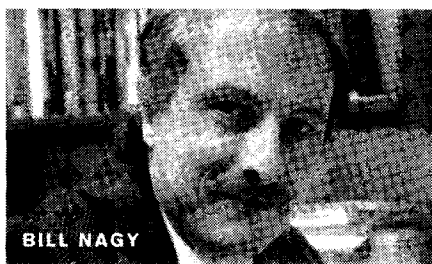
made sense. Human instructors are subject to "grader drift," a well-documented propensity to raise or lower grading standards unconsciously as they work. Come across a series of really good papers, and you adjust your standards upward to compensate; come across a series of bad papers, and the reverse happens. A computer's objectivity is never compromised in this way.



WHEN I FIRST REACHED DARRELL LAHAM by phone, he was reeling from a discussion with his lawyers over intellectual-property questions. "Things are really shaping up as far as the commercialization of this goes," he says. "I've spent countless hours these last six or seven months talking to lawyers, just to make sure we have all our t's crossed and our i's dotted." Laham is a fervent convert to LSA. As a student of Landauer's at the University of Colorado, he made LSA the subject of his master's research. Four years later, Laham is nearing the end of his Ph.D. in psychology and is a partner in Knowledge Analysis Technologies with Foltz and Landauer.

With Laham's assistance, IEA's inventors continued to tinker with the software, programming it to flag an essay with too high a score, for example, since very high scores signaled potential plagiarism. The team also experimented with alternate ways to grade papers, such as having LSA compare students' essays to a "gold standard"—a "perfect" essay on the topic written by a professor. IEA, they discovered, required a fair bit of tweaking when it first learned a subject. "We decided this couldn't be a point-and-click piece of software, because of the training it takes to get the system to the state where it's performing well," Laham says. "We have to be involved in calibrating it." After combining several grading methods, they eventually brought LSA up to the accuracy level (80 percent agreement with human graders) achieved by professionally trained markers at the Educational Testing Service, arguably the academic benchmark for grading reliability.

But it wasn't until they attended the 1998 AERA conference that the trio became serious about selling their software. "After we presented our research, people just wanted it," Laham said. When Myke Gluck, a professor of Information Studies at Florida



"IT'S EASILY DEMONSTRATED
IN FIVE MINUTES THAT EVEN CHILDREN
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SAYS BILL NAGY.



State University, asked the researchers to set up an automatic grading system for his master's course, Foundations of Information Studies, they readily agreed. The psychologists have yet to decide how much they will charge schools for their services; about their deal with Gluck, Laham will say only, "We're subsidizing the costs quite a bit to get the thing going."

That professors should be eager for automatic essay grading is, from one perspective, a rather pointed indictment of higher education. As college enrollments have soared, so have course sizes; yet, at the same time, university administrations are demanding greater efficiency from their faculties. As a result, the essay test has frequently gone the way of the dodo, superseded by its poor cousin, the multiple-choice exam. "I have two hundred students," Gluck reports. "I know essays are the best way to get students to learn, but let's get serious: Grading two hundred papers is just impossible to do with any quality at all. If I can't figure out another way to do it, I'll have to start using multiple-choice. That's the worst thing I could imagine."

Indeed, its inventors are marketing IEA as a multipurpose pedagogical tool, one that can teach as well as grade. Foltz, for example, fed IEA the textbook he used in his upper-level psychology class. After reading a chapter in the textbook, students wrote an essay and submitted it to the software. In return, IEA gave them an instant grade, identifying material they had missed and suggesting further reading. Students were allowed to rewrite their essays as often as they wished with the understanding that only their highest grade would be recorded. On average, students rewrote their essays three times. The typical grade for the first submission was an 85; by the third rewrite, the class average was 92. At the end of the semester, 98 percent of Foltz's students said they would choose to use the mechanical grader again if given the chance.

MANY OBSERVERS REMAIN UNIMPRESSED. The history of artificial intelligence is littered with bright new ideas that turned out to be duds. And the computerization of teaching is a volatile issue in academe, cutting to the heart of professors' self-image. Even as they moan about the mind-numbing drudgery of teaching and grading, they bristle at the suggestion that a computer could perform these tasks as well as they do.

When news of the Intelligent Essay Assessor reached the press, the backlash was immediate. Professors and pundits fired off letters to newspapers denouncing IEA as quackery. Kevin McNamara, an English professor at the University of Houston at Clear Lake, called the grader "a parasite that will thrive at the expense of education." Amy E. Schwartz, an editorial-page staffer at *The Washington Post*, inveighed against it in an Op-Ed article, claiming that it was symptomatic of the many "bad trends in education.... [It] harks back to the once firmly established view that the role of the teacher in the classroom was to make sure the student mastered and could recite back a set body of information."

A frequent and largely justified complaint about IEA is that it cannot appreciate creative uses of language. Trained to recognize the most common usages of words, the program is unable to appreciate deliberate but uncommon usages—metaphor, for example. In other words, IEA can't tell that the phrase "a horse of a different color" is not referring to horses at all. "It's a classic problem of standardized testing," says Monty Neill, the executive director of FairTest, a watchdog organization for test-taking technologies. "We set up tools to look for only one criterion, and students who answer something creatively get punished."

The Colorado team doesn't contest the point. Instead, they've attempted to incor-

porate the weakness into the software. If IEA detects creative phrasing, it is designed to admit defeat and turn the text over to a human for proper grading. In practice, however, the software seldom admits defeat. After all, its inventors argue, creativity is moot in short-essay answers. Professors who cling to the idea of the finely crafted essay obviously haven't marked one in years. The point, Laham maintains, is to convey the maximum amount of content; brevity trumps style. Critics, he adds, suffer from a misplaced romantic ideal that the student essay is always "a piece of literature, like a Charles Lamb kind of piece."

LSA's inventors also allow that word order and syntax present significant blind spots for the software. LSA completely ignores a word's grammatical role in a sentence, an approach that led one Stanford University professor to ask Landauer, "How much should you predicate on a semantic system that considers 'the cat ate the thumbtack' equivalent to 'the thumbtack ate the cat'?" Couldn't a student fool LSA by writing an essay that used the expected words but scrambled their syntax—or used no syntax at all? The previous sentence you just read, for example, could be represented: "student fool words expected syntax essay."

In response, Landauer points to experiments he's conducted offering bogus, ungrammatical essays to IEA. All scored poorly or failed, he claims. Obvious words, he speculates, are not the only important markers of content and meaning. Put another way, words that we might consider unessential are anything but. In one experiment, Landauer and Foltz used LSA to analyze a handful of medical students' essays on the heart. He found that supposedly nonessential words—articles and conjunctions—were contributing as much to the content as the keywords. "Perhaps the only way that a student can generate an accurate set of [keywords] is to compose a good essay," he mused in a 1997 paper on the experiment.

The critics still aren't convinced. One managed to humiliate IEA's inventors by using their own tool against them. In 1998, Landauer's team set up a demonstration of IEA with sample essay questions on the company's Web site (www.knowledge-technologies.com). Last November, Dennis Baron, a professor of English and linguistics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, visited the site. He was writing a scathing Op-Ed piece about IEA for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. To buttress his criticisms, he took the first twelve paragraphs of his article and presented them as answers to two of the Web site's essay questions—one on business practices and one on marketing. He received passing grades of 3.36 and 4.82, on a scale of 1 to 6. IEA didn't flag the business-practices essay as deviant in any way: "None of the confidence measures detected anything inappropriate with this essay," it responded. The marketing essay, though it received a good grade, was flagged as suspect; the software referred it to a human grader.

Baron was triumphant. "I'm always interested in stretching the capabilities of the technology," he says sarcastically. "So I said, okay, *Star Trek* device, assimilate

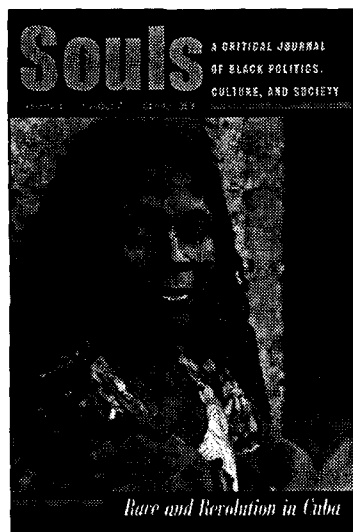
this!" On a more serious note, he worries that essay-grading software may actually do more harm than good. Machines may be intended to imitate human behavior, but what if they also shape it? "Essay-grading programs may give both students and teachers a false picture of how readers evaluate what they read, and that in turn will lead to false ideas about how we should write," he wrote in the *Chronicle*. Baron points to his experiments in the 1980s with The Writer's Workbench, a software program that analyzed grammar with the goal of helping writers clean up their syntax. "It was always telling me that I was no good, because I used too many long words and complex constructions." FairTest's Monty Neill agrees that such tools—now frequently included in word-processing programs—can adversely influence teaching: "If the kid writes something the machine won't accept, the teacher will say, 'Well, I won't accept it either.'"



BARON'S REVIEW STUNG THE COLORADO team. They backpedaled, hastily pointing

out that the on-line demo was "very, very beta." The most current version of LSA—the one that is going on the market this summer—is far better at smoking out cheats, says Laham. It offers enhanced statistical tools to assess whether the patterns of language in the essays match those found in conventional syntactic writing. One tool, for example, checks the essay's ratio of common words like "and" and "but" to the more uncommon, subject-specific words. Normal writing has a fairly standard ratio; mere lists of keywords stand out. "We've got red flags," Laham says. He cheerfully professes to be glad that Baron and others have tried to hack his system: "It's like free debugging."

LSA's most serious challenges to date, however, come not from people like Baron but from experts in linguistics and language theory. "The debate has gotten heated," says Arthur Graesser, the editor of the journal *Discourse Processes*, which devoted an issue last year to LSA. Graesser himself is experimenting with LSA as a tutoring aid. "The debates on LSA are some of the hottest around," he says. "Tom has had a lot of bad reactions over the last two years. He's had to take a lot of flak."



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Understandably, LSA troubles language experts. What does it mean that a machine can respond usefully to a text without recognizing grammar or syntax? The experts have long assumed that syntax is more important to language's operations than semantics; sentence meaning is predicated on sentence structure. This is why Landauer's program is so threatening. If you ignore grammar, it shouldn't be possible to emulate human language abilities with any degree of accuracy. "After I give a demonstration, I keep on having linguists stand up and tell me, 'What you've just done is impossible,'" Landauer says.

One way Landauer has tried to persuade the skeptical linguists is by invoking Plato's paradox, one of their own puzzles. The paradox derives from a simple question: How do you know all that you know? It has been amply demonstrated that people obtain an inexplicably large amount of knowledge from comparatively little information. The typical seventh-grader, for example, assimilates ten to fifteen new words each day. At the same time, studies show, she is likely to be formally exposed to only three new words each day. How does the seventh-

LSA OUTPERFORMED THE HUMAN GRADERS, AGREEING WITH THEIR RESULTS MORE OFTEN THAN THEY AGREED WITH EACH OTHER.

grader absorb the meaning of words she has not actually encountered?

Over the years, this mysterious "poverty of stimulus" phenomenon has led philosophers, linguists, biologists, and cognitive scientists on a merry chase. Most famously, it helped Noam Chomsky formulate his notion of an innate and universal human grammar in the 1960s. For Chomsky, the only explanation for our ability to master a system as complex as language is the existence of a hardwired grammar that assists us in making sense of sentences that we haven't encountered before. In this view, now widely accepted, we're born with language and have merely to discover it for ourselves.

In a 1997 article, Landauer challenged the Chomskian approach to Plato's paradox, citing his work with LSA as evi-

dence. LSA, he noted, distinguishes nuances in meaning purely through statistics, comparing the many different contexts in which a word occurs. Thus, when LSA encounters a new word, it does not attempt to determine the role it plays in a sentence; rather, it considers which other words appear nearby. As Landauer points out, humans often seem to behave in a similar way, guessing correctly at the meaning of a word by considering the meaning of nearby words. "More or less correct usage [of a word] often precedes referential knowledge," he wrote. "Many well-read adults know that Buddha sat long under a Banyan Tree (whatever that is) and Tahitian natives lived idyllically (whatever that means) on breadfruit and poi (whatever those are)."

At the same time, he noted that LSA's technique allows it to learn about words

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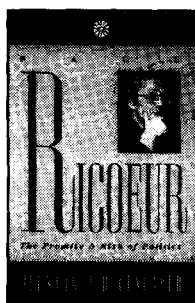


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not only from the context in which it finds them but from contexts in which it *doesn't* find them. Again, Landauer argues, people may assimilate language the same way. For example, if a child reads a book about a farm, he'll likely see the words "pig" and "cow." Obviously, then, the child learns that pigs and cows are closely related to the idea of a farm. However, he probably won't find the words "typewriter" and "Corvette" in the farm book. The child therefore implicitly learns that typewriters and Corvettes are *not* closely related to farms, which, in a subtle way, tells him something about their meanings, too. By looking at word meaning as a function of statistics, LSA offers this solution to Plato's paradox: We amass information quickly because even a word's *absence* tells us something about its meaning.

For all its pretensions to radicalism, Landauer's theory does bear some resemblance to Chomsky's; in place of Chomsky's innate grammar, Landauer posits an innate computational ability. But Landauer argues that his model is more robust because it's simpler. It doesn't stipulate that our brains come equipped with complex and seemingly arbitrary grammatical rules. Instead, our brains need only be powerful calcu-

lating machines, teasing out the meanings of words by quantifying their relationships as we encounter them.

Still, the LSA brain model leaves the question of everyday syntax up for grabs. If semantics are all-important, what is there left for syntax to do? Very little, respond the three psychologists. In a paper they presented at the 1997 meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, they speculated that syntax may merely act as a gatekeeper, signaling to us which sentences are worth our attention and which are pure nonsense. In comparison, the researchers argue, semantic context is so powerful that it can create meaning even when syntax is absent. Landauer takes a sort of rebellious glee in pointing to examples: "If I say to you, 'IBM stock bought Tom,' you know that it means I'm saying, 'Tom bought stock in IBM.' There's no way you'd ever think 'IBM bought stock in Tom.'" In which case, the vast majority of linguists have been largely wasting their time for years and years.

But linguists have some impressive counterexamples of their own. "It's easily demonstrable in *five minutes* that even children use syntax to determine meaning,"

says Bill Nagy, a professor of education at Seattle Pacific University. He notes a famous linguistic experiment in which a teacher shows children a doll and calls it either "Dax" or "a Dax." If the teacher uses "Dax," the children will think the doll's name is Dax. In the other case, the children will think the doll is a Dax-type doll. "It never fails," Nagy says.

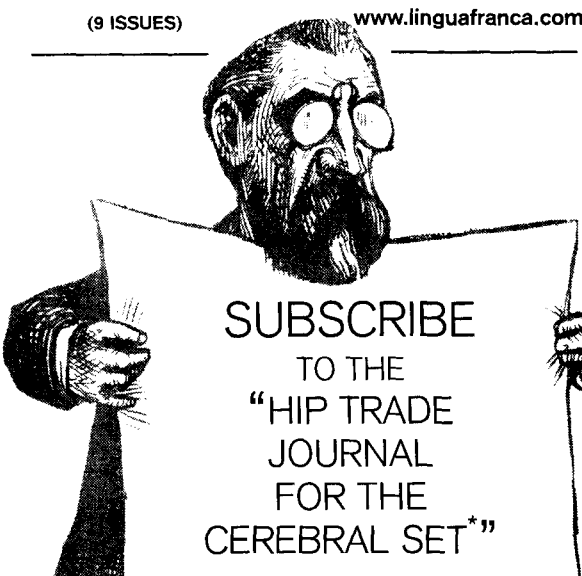
Possibly Landauer's most penetrating critic is Charles Perfetti, a professor of psychology and linguistics at the University of Pittsburgh. Perfetti knows and respects LSA; indeed, he assisted Foltz with his original essay-grading experiments in Pittsburgh. But in the special issue of *Discourse Processes* devoted to LSA, he soundly dismissed the trio's grandest claims. LSA, he argued, is nothing more than a very sophisticated keyword searcher, good at identifying "co-occurrences" of words but nothing more. If the results seem magical, it's because LSA can find word associations that are invisible to humans or of which they are unconscious. LSA's weakness is that it mimics only one narrow function of the brain; its strength is that it can perform this one task better than we can.

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More damningly, Perfetti noted that LSA need only slip up once to prove it's not a cognitive model. He pointed to the semantic space constructed from the 4.6-million-word encyclopedia. If it were truly a model of the brain, it would know everything an eighth-grader would know. But when asked for a synonym for "physician," it chose "nurse" over "doctor." "Such an error is not expected from a student but should be expected from a system that depends exclusively on the co-occurrence of words," Perfetti wrote, with what sounded like the thud of unimpeachable judgment.



IN MANY RESPECTS, THE DEBATE OVER LSA reflects the anxieties faced by traditional academic disciplines as they encounter the computer revolution. If linguists have traditionally emphasized rules of syntax or grammar, it may be partly because these features have offered the most convenient means of analyzing language; humans can't consciously do massive statistical assessments of word

LSA MAY NOT BE A BLUEPRINT OF THE HUMAN BRAIN, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE SHOULDN'T TAKE IT SERIOUSLY.

patterning. Computers have changed all that. They can do what we can't.

Few scholars will dispute the fact that if you analyze a text carefully enough, you'll discover at least *some* interesting statistical patterns. And a few of those patterns may be useful in helping us understand how our brains process and produce language. But given LSA's considerable lacunae—its indifference to scrambled word order, its inability to distinguish between synonyms and other similarities among words, its failure to grasp metaphors and similes—it's difficult to believe that LSA is even a rudimentary blueprint of the human brain. As Perfetti suggests, LSA may be best appreciated as an extremely powerful tool. It makes for an excellent assessor of the pedestrian short essay but no more.

That doesn't mean we shouldn't take the software seriously. IEA may not be a threat to linguists and philosophers, but it may nonetheless be a threat to teachers. If a rather obtuse machine can grade essays as well as a human can—and for a fraction of the price—isn't that a rather unflattering commentary on the grader, the essay, and the entire teaching process? Could so much university-level instruction really be this primitive? Rather than turn up their noses at the software's limitations, perhaps professors ought to be alarmed by what its success says about their own.

Clive Thompson is editor at large for *Shift* magazine and a technology columnist for *Newsday*. His email address is clive@bway.net

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THE TECH





Obliged to inhabit the dépassé quarters of cash-strapped universities, professors are rarely seen as the vanguard of societal change. But, as *Lingua Franca* discovered, when it comes to the digital revolution, the old clichés don't apply. With the vast majority of its members enjoying free access to sophisticated computer technology, the professoriat is one of America's most wired populations. More than just avid users, however, academics are busy shaping—and misshaping—the electronic universe.

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DENIS DUTTON

OCCUPATION

Professor of philosophy at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand

WHAT HE'S DONE

The irrepressible editor of *Philosophy and Literature* had all the pundits talking this winter when his annual Bad Writing Contest ribbed Judith Butler and Homi Bhabha for impenetrable prose. Meanwhile, Dutton was hard at work on a less sensational pursuit: operating "Arts and Letters Daily" (www.cybereditions.com/alddaily/), a Web-based compendium of links to the latest news, opinion, and gossip about the world's intellectuals. The Web site, with the motto *veritas odit moras* ("Truth detests folly"), is updated daily and provides Web-savvy eggheads with one-stop shopping for reprints of the latest provocative book review, literary disputation, or biting cultural analysis. Culled from dozens of publications such as *The New Republic* and the *London Review of Books* (not to mention *Lingua Franca*), it's everything an aspiring intellectual needs to know.

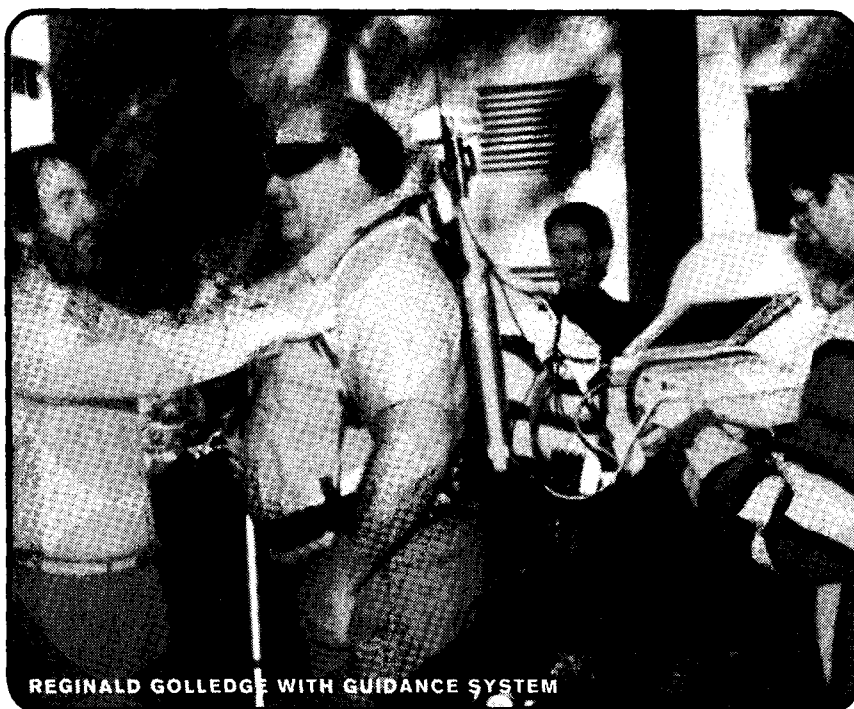
WHY IT MATTERS

The Web is notorious for drowning users with information they don't want, don't need—or just can't trust. What the new medium gains in relevance and sexiness, say its critics, it loses in accountability, reliability, and quality. But Dutton's site stands out for its consistent blend of high-quality, irreverent writing and its unerring instinct for the important and interesting.

QUOTE

"At this stage in its evolution, the Web resembles a typical Australian goldfield, with vast mountains of low-grade ore. Mining in both cases can be arduous. On the Internet, it means sifting through endless streams of verbose, underedited, often self-indulgent prose, frequently accompanied by those tedious graphics that negate the 'instant information' advantage of the Web."

COMPILED BY JENS DAVID OHLIN



JAMES P. CRUTCHFIELD

OCCUPATION

Research professor and director of the Computation, Dynamics, and Inference Program at the Santa Fe Institute

WHAT HE'S DONE

Real-life Franksteins, Crutchfield and his team are the creators of artificial life. But it's not the sort of artificial life likely to wander up to the North Pole or to harm Crutchfield's friends: Cellular automata, as they are called, are computer programs that simulate the behavior of cells. Just as organic cells presumably communicate with each other in very simple ways in order to form complex organisms, the automata follow simple sets of instructions such as, "If most of the nearest cells are black, turn black." These instructions require the automata to pattern their behavior on the behavior of their neighbors, producing in the end surprisingly complex and unpredictable networks. Crutchfield's team is now working to develop communities of cellular automata that will evolve toward blinking in unison—

simulating the rhythm of a heartbeat.

WHY IT MATTERS

Crutchfield's research cuts in two directions: On the one hand, scientists can use his computer program to shed light on the inner workings of evolution and on the nature of complexity in biology. On the other hand, Crutchfield's team brings insights from biology to bear on problems of computer science such as the distribution of computational tasks.

QUOTE

"Cellular automata give us some insight into population dynamics in biology. If all goes well, they will also tell us how to use evolutionary algorithms for programming parallel computers. These are really two sides of the same coin."



REGINALD GOLLEDGE

OCCUPATION

Professor of geography at the University of California at Santa Barbara

WHAT HE'S DONE

In 1985, Golledge, who lost his sight to

a degenerative disease of the optic nerve, was surprised by a phone call from UC-Santa Barbara perceptual psychologist Jack Loomis. Loomis was convinced that with Golledge's help he could develop a device that would help the blind know their surroundings. Together with Carnegie Mellon psychologist Roberta Clatzky, the triumvirate built the prototype for a portable navigation system. It uses the Global Positioning System, which has twenty-four satellites orbiting the globe, to pinpoint the traveler's exact location on a detailed map. This information is then communicated to a computer programmed with copious details about the surrounding terrain—down to cobblestone paths and trees. As the user moves toward a destination, he or she hears a voice through earphones saying what's up ahead, including the distance and direction of obstacles and landmarks.

WHY IT MATTERS

The blind users of Golledge's system will receive more information about their surroundings than a cane or seeing eye dog could ever provide. Unfortunately, the descriptions of the environment will never be perfect because moving obstacles—like people—can't be included on maps. The apparatus also needs to be miniaturized: Right now it's a bulky backpack system weighing twenty-two pounds.

QUOTE

"The system creates an auditory virtual reality instead of a visual virtual reality. The sound makes it seem as if the environment is talking to you as you pass through it.... But there's a limit to how many sounds you can perceive at once. With your eyes, you can take a quick glance, then close them and remember a thousand things. But hearing ten thousand sounds at once would be pretty difficult."



EDWARD L. AYERS

OCCUPATION

Hugh P. Kelly Professor of History at the University of Virginia

WHAT HE'S DONE

EXCERPT FROM THE CIVIL WAR-ERA DIARY OF ANNA MELINGE

52 Thursday 7th
To day it is warm and
dry. we are awaking at
our wheat & flour
✓ Breeder come here on
account of the Rebels he
lives in Hancock
Friday 8th

Ayers's Web site enables users to drop in on two Civil War-era communities: Augusta County in Virginia and Franklin County in Pennsylvania. One is Southern and the other Northern, but they are separated by just a few hundred miles. The Web site (jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vshadow2/) allows students to access a digital arsenal of military, church, and agricultural records from the two counties, as well as letters, diaries, maps, photographs, and newspaper articles from the war years. Later this year, Norton will publish part one of a CD-ROM version of the Web site under the title *Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War*.

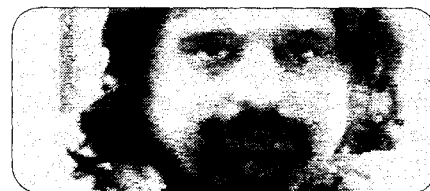
WHY IT MATTERS

With direct access to a vast array of primary materials, students can reconstruct for themselves the historical circumstances and moral complexities of the Civil War. Ayers encourages them not to rely on the conclusions of scholars but to examine the evidence on their own, filtering the grand debates of the era through the records left behind by ordinary nineteenth-century Americans.

QUOTE

"The greatest obstacle new media faces is its own hyperbole," Ayers told one interviewer. "As a historian, no matter how postmodern I might be, I don't throw around words like 'revolution.' A railroad is a revolution. Is the Internet a new railroad? Is it just TV on steroids? We don't

know yet. We're in the crystal-radio stage of this technology."



GREGORY BOTHUN

OCCUPATION

Professor of physics at the University of Oregon

WHAT HE'S DONE

You don't have to be an astronomer to catch a good look at the stars—if Bothun has his way. With the use of a digital camera and high-speed data transfers, Bothun hopes to give students in remote classrooms the chance to view live data transmitted from faraway telescopes.

WHY IT MATTERS

Currently, even professional astronomers compete fiercely for scarce telescope time. Where does this leave students? Until now, they've relied on commercial software that simulates the experience of scientific discovery. Bothun's project would allow students to acquire and analyze raw data about the universe for themselves.

QUOTE

"I believe it is the personal responsibility

of the scientist to help educate the public to show that we live in a rational universe. With the widespread appeal of the Internet, scientists now have a good opportunity to place their data and their explanations in a public forum allowing immediate access."



MANUEL CASTELLS

OCCUPATION

Professor of sociology and planning at the University of California at Berkeley

WHAT HE'S DONE

Castells spent twelve years traveling all over the world to observe the impact of information technology in situ. His findings became an epic trilogy called *The Information Age* (Blackwell). In the three volumes—*The Rise of the Network Society* (1996), *The Power of Identity* (1997), and *End of Millennium* (1998)—the Spanish sociologist argues that from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the rise of religious fundamentalism, information technology has been the primary motor of change in the late-twentieth century. In a world where access is everything, the Internet has created sweeping new categories of inclusion and exclusion: Whole populations, like the American urban poor, disappear into informational "black holes," while the wired and wealthy shape the possibilities of a medium that forges new communities even while it blows the old ones apart.

WHY IT MATTERS

With *The Information Age*, Castells has won over not only the academic digerati but also a wider world of policy makers, industry leaders, and intellectually curious Web mavens. At a recent meeting of the World Economic Forum, the onetime political exile from Franco's Spain had the opportunity to address a crowd that included Kofi Annan, Al Gore, Bill Gates, George Soros, and Yasser Arafat.

QUOTE

"This new form of social organization, in its pervasive globality, is diffusing throughout the world—as industrial capitalism and its twin enemy, industrial statism, did in the twentieth century—

shaking institutions, transforming cultures, creating wealth and inducing poverty, spurring greed, innovation, and hope, while simultaneously imposing hardship and instilling despair."



THOMAS K. LANDAUER

OCCUPATION

Professor of psychology at the University of Colorado

WHAT HE'S DONE

Landauer's bitter attack on the computer industry, *The Trouble With Computers: Usefulness, Usability, and Productivity* (MIT, 1995), was just the opening salvo from a group of critics who question the cult of the all-powerful computer. Landauer wondered if the trillions of dollars spent on computers in this country have yielded more than marginal increases in economic productivity. On a more upbeat note, Landauer has also helped develop the Intelligent Essay Assessor, a program that grades student essays [see "New Word Order," page 28].

WHY IT MATTERS

Ever get stuck in a checkout line with a cashier who can't operate the register, with a UPC code that won't scan properly, or with a debit card that gets declined? Landauer wants software designers to test

their programs on real people doing real jobs. His mantra is UCD, UCD, UCD: user-centered design, user-centered development, user-centered deployment. A computer is useless if you can't use it.

QUOTE

"What's going on here? I believe that computers are in deep trouble. Certainly they have had and continue to have amazing triumphs; they've helped put humans on the moon, revised warfare completely, made it possible to solve centuries-old mathematics problems, led to bursts of new scientific knowledge, and taken over our bookkeeping and our telephone switches... but the promise that computers would contribute to the economy, to a vast improvement in the standard of living, has not been kept."



HAROLD DIBBLE

OCCUPATION

Professor of anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, curator of the European section of the University of Pennsylvania, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

WHAT HE'S DONE

Back in 1985, Dibble was the first archaeologist to use a laser instrument called an



A HAROLD DIBBLE EXCAVATION

COURTESY BLACKWELL PUBLISHERS/UC BOULDER/HAROLD DIBBLE

electronic theodolite to measure excavated artifacts in three dimensions. The theodolite, now widely used in archaeology, increases both the speed and the precision with which researchers can take measurements in the field. In addition to developing related computer software, Dibble has also co-authored (with Shannon McPherron) *Virtual Dig* (Mayfield, 1999), a workbook and CD-ROM that allows students to plan a virtual excavation based on real data from one of Dibble's digs in Combe-Capelle, France.

WHY IT MATTERS

Virtual Dig gives students a feel for doing an excavation without having to visit the nearest Neolithic site. Students put together a budget for their dig, select a crew, and then analyze and interpret their findings. They can then compare their conclusions with Dibble's own published results. The CD-ROM includes full-color maps of the site and photos of the artifacts, as well as related graphs and charts.

QUOTE

"Computers can simulate experiences that are otherwise almost impossible to have."



PATRICK JUOLA

OCCUPATION

Linguist, assistant professor of computer science at Duquesne University

WHAT HE'S DONE

Ever try to email a five-hundred-page manuscript to your publisher or your best friend—only to have that person tell you to use a Stuffit program? Little did you know that the same software you used to compress your manuscript was the latest tool in the study of language. Juola takes a text such as the Bible or the collected works of Shakespeare and compares its renderings in two different languages, say Russian and Maori. After running both versions of the text through compression software similar to commercial programs like Stuffit, he measures the size of the resulting files. Because the program condenses files by reducing repetitions, the size of each compressed file reflects the number

of unique words and word sequences in the original. The simpler the language, the smaller the file; the more complex the language, the larger the file.

WHY IT MATTERS

Using different compression algorithms, Juola can search for different kinds of language complexity. He has been able to map a language's reliance on prefixes and suffixes against its reliance on syntax, for instance, with a degree of precision and subtlety that would be unattainable without the computer.

QUOTE

"The real advances that have made this possible are in the availability of large amounts of computer-readable text. I can buy CDs with forty or fifty different versions of the Bible—or the complete works of William Shakespeare, or an entire encyclopedia—for a hundred dollars. In 1960, to put all of Shakespeare onto a computer would have cost several million dollars in tapes and punch cards alone."



JANE M. HEALY

OCCUPATION

Colorado-based educational psychologist, consultant to schools and parents' groups

WHAT SHE'S DONE

Healy's *Failure to Connect* (Simon & Schuster, 1998) mounts a full-frontal attack on the misuse of computers in early-childhood education. Originally a techno-enthusiast, Healy started visiting grade-school computer labs to see how children interact with their computers. She was disturbed to find simplistic software packages that were more devoted to edutainment than learning; she also discovered poor lighting conditions, students acquiring bad posture, and an impulse among teachers and administrators to plop children in front of computer screens instead of teaching them basic language and analytic skills.

WHY IT MATTERS

Al Gore, take heed: Although Healy is still optimistic about the educational *potential* of computers, she raises sharp questions about politicians' promises to wire

every classroom. In the software she's seen in schools, flashy graphics take precedence over challenging tasks that require problem-solving skills. What's needed? Computer programmers should work with learning experts who understand how and why children learn to read, and teachers should introduce computers to students gradually, starting at age seven.

QUOTE

"When I first went to consult in schools, I assumed that this great evolution was coming to pass. But I was horrified by what I saw. The children were not being made smarter—they were being dumbed down by the machines. Why is America constantly looking for a quick fix when raising and educating its children? It can't be done by clicking a mouse and leaving it at that."



STEFAN HELMREICH

OCCUPATION

Lecturer in anthropology at Stanford University

WHAT HE'S DONE

Is artificial life socially constructed? It sounds like either a tautology or an oxymoron—but that hasn't stumped Helmreich. *Silicon Second Nature: Culturing Artificial Life in a Digital World* (California, 1998) is Helmreich's anthropological study of artificial-intelligence researchers at the Santa Fe Institute. He asks how computer research is affected by the assumptions of its practitioners, who are almost all middle-class white men. As he explores the researchers' self-perceptions, he finds that many see themselves as omnipotent creators of a more ordered life-form.

WHY IT MATTERS

It's sometimes hard to tell whether we pursue research into artificial life because we'd like to see machines behave more like people or because we'd like to see people behave more like machines. Either way, Helmreich's work raises the possibility that computers may be no more rational, and no less flawed, than their creators, who made the machines in their own image, after all.

QUOTE

"The claims of some artificial-life researchers to have synthesized life may sound strikingly novel, but they also mutate a well-rooted historical tradition of attempting to manufacture living things, a tradition that entwines activities that have been variously mystical, literary, religious, technological, and scientific."



WILLIAM LABOV

OCCUPATION

Professor of linguistics, director of the linguistics laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania

WHAT HE'S DONE

Are regional dialects disappearing from American English? Conventional wisdom says yes, but according to Labov's systematic, computerized analysis, regional accents are anything but a thing of the past. Using computer software that analyzes vowel usage and speech patterns, Labov has concluded that accents and dialects are actually on the rise in the inner cities. His findings will be published in print form as a first-of-its-kind phonological atlas, which will also be released on a CD-ROM with audio clips. Parts of it are already on the Web (www.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas/home.html).

WHY IT MATTERS

Labov, a pioneer in the field of sociolinguistics, believes that his findings are a "bad omen" for American society. Stronger accents and more distinct dialects could be symptoms of the growing geographical and cultural isolation of the inner city. That isolation could reinforce barriers to educational equality: As the recent Ebonics fracas demonstrated, to teach kids how to read, you need to understand how and why they talk the way they do. Meanwhile, Labov's work has happier ramifications for computerized voice-recognition software, which may soon be able to understand you no matter how funny you talk.

QUOTE

"All of this technology could easily carry us away from the human issues involved in the use of language. From my point of view, that

might win the game but lose the match. I spend a great deal of my time in the laboratory, at the office, or in class. But the work that I really want to do, the excitement and adventure of the field, comes in meeting the speakers of the language face-to-face, entering their homes, hanging out on corners, porches, taverns, pubs, and bars."



PAUL GINSPIRG

OCCUPATION

Physicist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory

WHAT HE'S DONE

Do too many peer reviewers spoil a scientific paper? Not according to Ginsparg—or the many physicists who visit his Web site (xxx.lanl.gov). Ginsparg has created an online database of scientific papers, available to the entire professional community for reading and commentary before their publication in print journals. Since its genesis in 1991, the Ginsparg Net (as it is now known) has grown from a resource serving two hundred physicists to an international archive accessed by more than sixty thousand users in eighty countries. Scientists in the developing world enjoy the same level of access as a graduate student at Harvard.

WHY IT MATTERS

Instead of waiting for results to be published in print journals with months-long publication lags, physicists now get immediate access to each other's research findings. Physicists who post papers receive private emails from those peers who choose to critique their methodology and results. The writer then resubmits a revised draft, which is posted on Ginsparg's site. A potentially unlimited number of scientists can contribute to the development of each author's work—strengthening the final article before it goes to a print journal.

QUOTE

"The essential question at this point is not whether the scientific research literature will migrate to fully electronic dissemination but rather how quickly this transition will take place now that all of the requisite tools are available."



JANET H. MURRAY

OCCUPATION

Director of the Program in Advanced Interactive Narrative Technology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology

WHAT SHE'S DONE

Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (MIT, 1997) argues that computer games, hypertext fiction, and virtual reality have changed the way we tell stories. The reader, once passive before the will of the author, has become newly empowered to shape narratives. Heavy on cyberculture, *Star Trek* examples, and French literary theory, Murray's tome aspires to be a prolegomenon for a new genre: cyberliterature. Will she be the Nicholas Negroponte of storytelling?

WHY IT MATTERS

The champions of hypertext have long heralded the dawn of nonlinear fiction. Skeptics remained unimpressed: Were interactive stories any closer to literature than to adolescent role-playing fantasy games? Murray argues that a changing world requires a changing conception of literature. Conventional literature was fine for conventional humanity. Now, she argues, we need cyberdrama as kaleidoscopic as our lives.

QUOTE

"In trying to imagine Hamlet on the holodeck, I am not asking if it is possible to translate a particular Shakespeare play into another format. I am asking if we can hope to capture in cyberdrama something as true to the human condition, and as beautifully expressed, as the life that Shakespeare captured on the Elizabethan stage."



DAVID F. NOBLE

OCCUPATION

Professor of history at York University,

and currently visiting professor of history at Harvey Mudd College

WHAT HE'S DONE

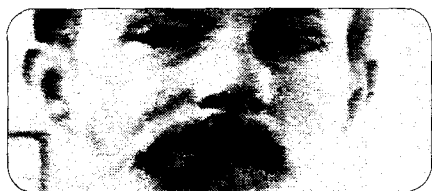
Noble's "Digital Diploma Mills" is a no-holds-barred attack on the computerization and commodification of higher education. Published on the Internet, in the Marxist journal *Monthly Review*, and in *October*, a prominent journal of the visual arts, Noble's 1997 essay calls on professors to join forces against university administrators and their high-tech schemes. Noble believes that the spread of computer technology into the classroom and the dormitory is undermining the professional status and intellectual freedom of the faculty. When lecture notes are transformed into digital courseware, for example, professors lose control of their own intellectual property, which becomes a commodity for universities to buy and sell for their own benefit. Meanwhile, the demand to answer countless email messages increases faculty responsibilities without any accompanying increase in salary.

WHY IT MATTERS

As a professor at York University in Toronto, Noble participated in a successful faculty strike that resulted in the university's agreeing not to digitize any educational resources without faculty approval. If professors continue to fight, and win, such battles, it will be in part due to Noble's clarion call.

QUOTE

"Here, as elsewhere, technology is but a vehicle and a disarming disguise."



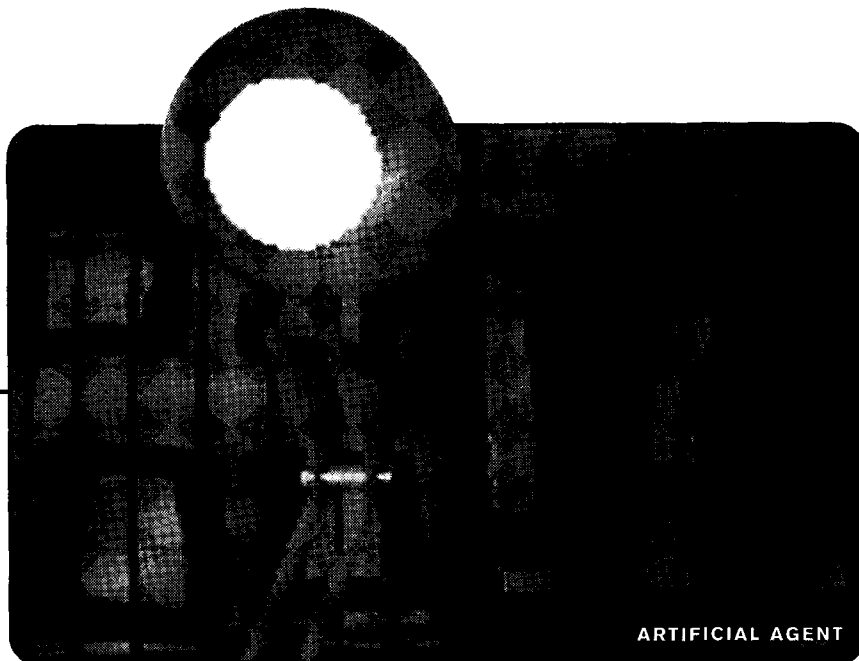
JOHN A. PINTO

OCCUPATION

Howard Crosby Butler Professor of the History of Architecture at Princeton University

WHAT HE'S DONE

Pinto's students can prowl the streets of old Rome from the comfort of their dorm rooms thanks to his on-line version of the famous Nolli map. Named after Giovanni Battista Nolli, who supervised its creation in 1748, the map is considered a masterpiece of urban cartography. Pinto's digital version includes photographs of the hundreds of monuments



marked on the map as well as photographs of modern-day Rome, which are included so students can see how the cityscape has changed over time. The site also provides pertinent literary annotations—excerpts from writings on Rome by everyone from St. Augustine to Henry James.

WHY IT MATTERS

With Pinto's map, which he developed with his colleague Kirk Alexander, students can put the monuments of Rome in their original contexts—cultural, literary, historical, and geographic. And they enjoy a visual experience worthy of Cecil B. De Mille. The slide projector, once the art historian's best friend, might be the next historical relic.

QUOTE

"The new technology allows students to exercise their own intellectual curiosity much more freely. They can explore the city by walking with the cursor down streets we don't discuss in lecture, and they can make their own discoveries or raise interesting questions that often yield excellent paper topics."



PHOEBE SENGERS

OCCUPATION

Research scientist, Fulbright scholar at the Center for Art and Media Technology in Karlsruhe, Germany

WHAT SHE'S DONE

Sengers, who received a doctorate from Carnegie Mellon University last year, studies the strange world of "artificial agents"—from computer code to actual robots, from smart vacuum cleaners to virtual pets. Although these agents are programmed to complete very specific tasks, they aren't programmed to coordinate their behavior into a seamless whole that seems rational to the rest of us. That, Sengers believes, gives artificial agents the appearance of being almost schizophrenic—jumping around randomly, from one behavior to the next. To remedy this disease, Sengers is trying to build agents that can explain their behavior and motivations. Her research combines hard-core cognitive science with cultural theory—from the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s to *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

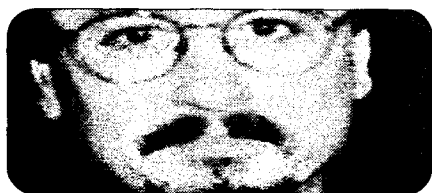
WHY IT MATTERS

Some theorists argue that the only way we can understand another person's behavior is to fashion it into a coherent narrative. Applying this idea to technological instruments could inaugurate a new generation of user-friendly software products, from word processors that explain themselves to avatars that can speak for you in virtual reality.

QUOTE

"Cultural theory is often in danger of being ghettoized. Connecting it to real technological developments can give theory a broader impact. I see my work as one possible way out of the science wars: uniting concerns of scientists and

cultural theorists in projects that are meaningful to both.”



PETER SUBER

OCCUPATION

Professor of philosophy at Earlham College

WHAT HE'S DONE

Since 1996, philosophers have been clicking their way to Suber's Web page, where he maintains a cornucopia of personally vetted philosophical links (www.earlham.edu/tildapeters/philinks.htm). From Suber's site, you can swiftly find your way to philosophical journals, associations, job postings, mailing lists, preprints, and even course syllabi. Until recently, the site was not searchable by keyword. But now it includes Hippias, a limited-area search engine developed by the University of Evansville's Tony Beavers.

A Hippias search turns up a directory of quality-controlled Web sites. Suber is also the co-editor of Beavers's latest innovation, Noesis, a Web-based archive of digital material for research purposes. Complete texts of philosophical essays, lectures, and reviews are immediately available and searchable by keyword. A planned merger of the two sites is in the works.

WHY IT MATTERS

A search for "Plato" with the AltaVista search engine brings up the Greek philosopher's dialogues—but you also get hits for a town in Illinois. The search engine on Hippias separates the philosophical from the pedestrian, and the Noesis search engine separates the profound from the perfunctory. The result is fully "zoomable" searching.

QUOTE

"Philosophy is a field in which a good print library has far more primary and secondary sources than the Web. I often get email from users asking why Hippias can't find much on so-and-so or such and such. The answer is that, for many philosophical topics, the Web is not yet the best place for research. However, Hippias and Noesis are laying foundations for software research so that,

as more content arrives, useful tools and services will already be at hand, debugged, optimized, widely known, and linked."



CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER

OCCUPATION

Former professor of architecture at University of California at Berkeley, now general contractor and practicing architect in the Berkeley area

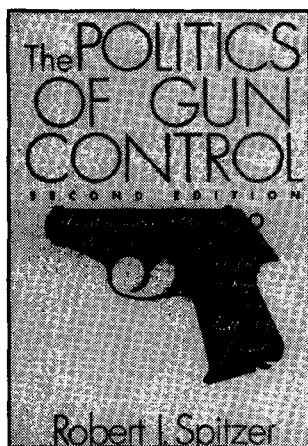
WHAT HE'S DONE

Alexander's 1977 book, *A Pattern Language* (Oxford), sought to create a universal dictionary of design motifs that nonarchitects can use to build office buildings, homes, and even towns for themselves. In it, he presents 253 "patterns" or structures that have occurred repeatedly over time. According to Alexander, all spatial entities—from the

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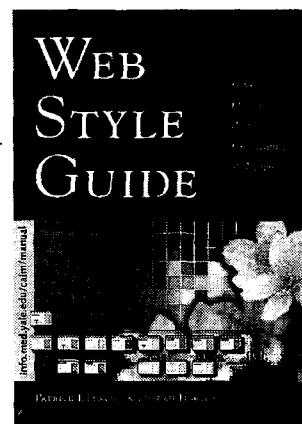
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smallest room to an entire continent—include these visual elements. By the very frequency of their appearance, he argues, these motifs can be identified as the basic building blocks of design.

WHY IT MATTERS

Oddly enough, it's software developers not architects who have adopted Alexander's text as their bible. Pioneers of object-oriented programming are looking at Alexander's work to help them design a common programming language. Might there be patterns in existing software—combinations of commands that crop up again and again—that behave like the patterns Alexander sees in the visual world? If so, those patterns could be treated as the equivalent of discrete objects and moved about among programs accordingly.

QUOTE

"The big thing is the attempt to create beautiful and complete wholes—and software people are not there. But the fact

that ten thousand people are working on patterns in software means these programmers are being effective."



PATRICIA CHURCHLAND

OCCUPATION

Professor of philosophy at the University of California at San Diego and an adjunct the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla.

WHAT SHE'S DONE

One half of a power couple with her husband Paul, also a philosopher at UCSD, Patricia Churchland is one of the most influential and controversial figures in the consciousness wars. The mind-body problem, Churchland argues, cannot be studied in isolation: Philosophers must seek to understand the brain's neurological activ-

ities. Churchland practices what she preaches. Her own efforts to develop a "computational" model of the brain as an information processor are informed by the latest in neurological research. She gleans knowledge from magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) maps of the brain and from single-cell recording devices, which use microelectrodes to gauge the activities and responses of individual neurons.

WHY IT MATTERS

Her critics accuse her of reductionism and overstatement. But if she and her husband are right, then magnetoencephalography and MRIs might turn out to be the holy grail that scientists and philosophers are looking for—the secret of human cognition.

QUOTE

"We can't understand the nature of how we smell without understanding the nature of the olfactory system. Similarly, we can't understand the nature of consciousness unless we understand the nature of the brain. It would be very nice if we could answer fundamental questions about the brain without actually taking it apart. But that's not how nature is, how reality is."



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THE UNMAKING

AN
ANTHROPOLOGIST
TAKES ON
A LEGEND—
AND PUTS HIS
REPUTATION
ON THE LINE
BY HAL COHEN

WHEN NEOCONSERVATIVE PUNDIT DAVID Horowitz saw the book, he leaped into action. In his *Salon* magazine column, Horowitz touted Middlebury College anthropologist David Stoll's *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Westview, 1998) as a groundbreaking assault on multiculturalism, political correctness, and the academic and political left. "The story of Rigoberta Menchú, a Quiché Mayan from Guatemala whose autobiography catapulted her to international fame, won her the Nobel Peace Prize and made her an international emblem of the dispossessed indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere and their attempt to rebel against the oppression of European conquerors, has now been exposed as a political fabrication, a tissue of lies," he wrote in January. "The fictional story of Rigoberta Menchú is a piece of communist propaganda designed to incite hatred of Europeans and Westerners and the societies they have built, and to build support for communist and terrorist organizations at war with the democracies of the West."

The right-wing press, from the serious (*The Wall Street Journal*) to the not-so-serious (*The New York Post*), was quick to adopt Horowitz's opinions as its own. With the assistance of a front-page *New York Times* investigation, Stoll's book had apparently established that the story of Rigoberta's political awakening, her transformation from illiterate peasant girl to brutalized and outraged leftist, as recorded in her widely taught autobiographical narrative, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (Verso, 1983), failed to meet basic journalistic standards of truth. Thus was the credibility of Guatemala's most famous oppressed person—as well as the credibility of the left-wing academics who enthusiastically promoted her *testimonio* in their classes—thoroughly undermined.

Since the publication of Stoll's book last November, the Menchú affair has become a complex jumble of disputed facts and

alleged motives. This much, however, is clear: Many of Stoll's admirers appear not to have read his book. If they had, they would have noticed that the anthropologist offers a considerably more nuanced picture of Rigoberta than his champions in the conservative media allow. For Stoll, "There is no doubt about the most important points: that a dictatorship massacred thousands of indigenous peasants, that the victims included half of Rigoberta's immediate family...and that she joined a revolutionary movement to liberate her country."

Stoll has reason to be exasperated by the right's appropriation of his work. "Menchú is unquestionably the victim of political violence," he insists. "To call her a liar is simply inappropriate." But even as he labors to disassociate himself from his right-wing admirers—with letters to editors, explanations of his argument, endless defenses to colleagues—Latin Americanist scholars and human-rights activists accuse him of hidden agendas, factual errors, and even complicity with the Guatemalan military.

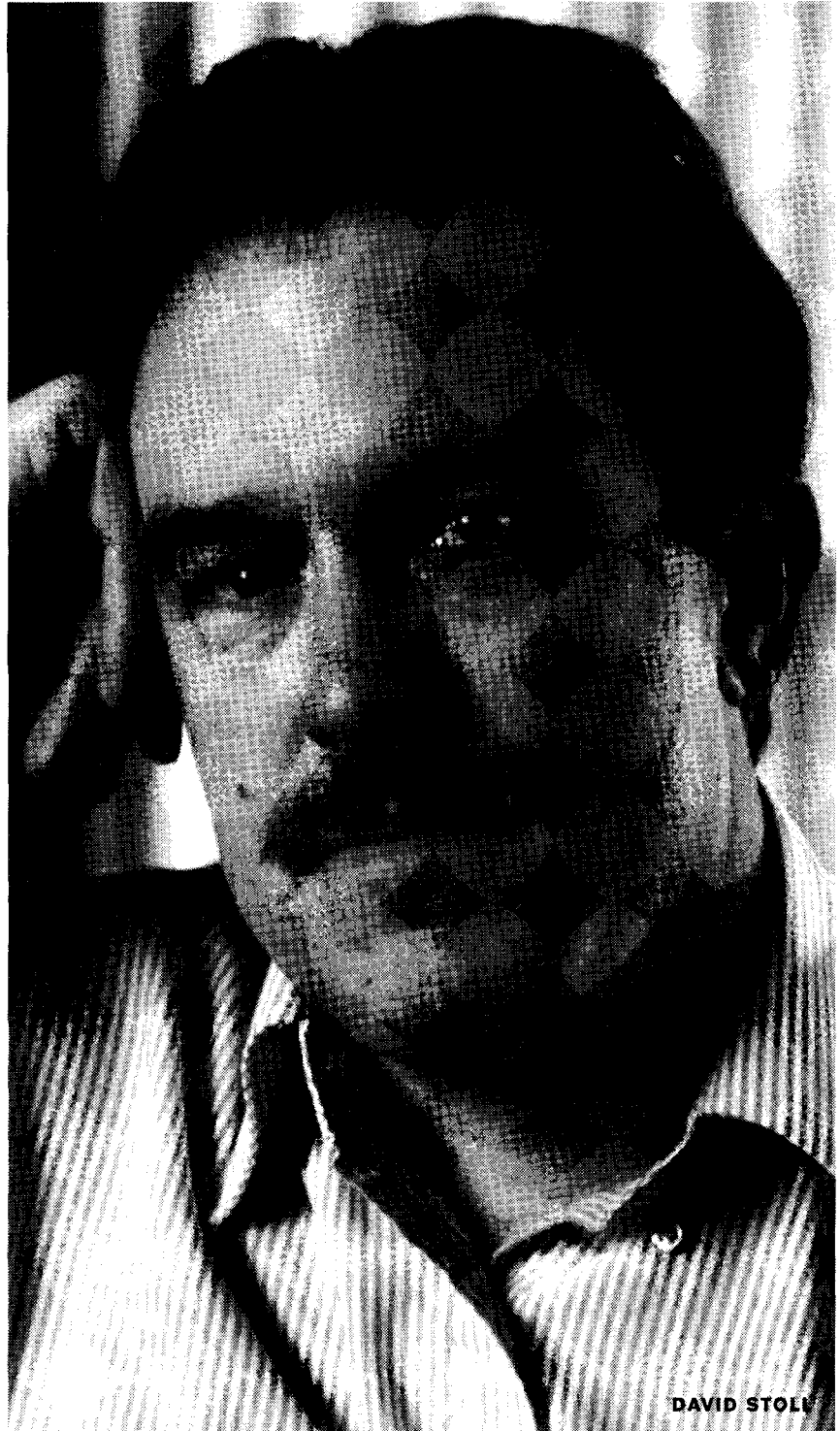
Stoll says he set out to honor a venerable anthropological imperative: to grant ordinary Maya voices of their own and to correct the distorted images of indigenous peoples promulgated by ideologues of both left and right. And yet, in writing *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, Stoll has ended up bringing nearly as much suspicion on himself as he has on Rigoberta and her guerrilla allies.

DAVID STOLL'S current notoriety marks a dramatic change for a man whose career has been spent largely pursuing subjects of interest to a select group of Latin Americanists. After graduating from the University of Michigan in 1974, he took a job with a now defunct weekly, the *Ann Arbor Sun*. After about a year, he left and traveled around Latin America gathering information on the then all-but-untouched subject of Protestantism in the region, which would become the focus of

OF RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ

his first two books. (Stoll himself is a “lapsed Catholic.”) These books, *Fishers of Men or Founders of Empire?* (1982) and *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (1990), established two Stoll trademarks: his contrarian streak—he looked critically but sympathetically at the Latin American evangelicals whom most had written off as CIA dupes—and his markedly journalistic tone and methodology. In his second book, Stoll laid the groundwork for his later thinking, arguing that Indians saw Protestantism as an alternative to both the brutality of the military government and the Roman Catholic liberation theology espoused by guerrilla supporters. In 1985, Stoll enrolled in the anthropology department at Stanford University; after completing his dissertation, in the early 1990s, he received various fellowships before becoming an assistant professor at Middlebury College in 1997.

Stoll’s dissertation assessed the difficult predicament of the Mayan Indians during the Guatemalan civil war. The war, which had been smoldering in Guatemalan cities since a CIA-sponsored coup toppled a moderate left government in 1954, ripped through the rural highlands in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Guided by counterinsurgency advisers from the United States and other countries, the army subverted the Marxist-Leninist guerrillas by undermining their potential support: the rural Maya. Through a policy euphemistically termed rural pacification, the army neutralized these Indians. Towns and cropland were destroyed and the peasants relocated to “model villages” reminiscent of Vietnam’s “strategic hamlets.” Indians were recruited into army-organized civil patrols, and those suspected of ties to the guerrillas were severely punished. In the process of “pacifying” the Maya, the army adopted a policy of crushing and often indiscriminate terror, while the guerrillas—hopelessly overextended and outgunned—could offer little protection. By the time a peace accord was signed in 1996, some 200,000



DAVID STOLL

ALTHOUGH COLLEAGUES WARNED HIM NOT TO COMMIT PROFESSIONAL SUICIDE, STOLL DECIDED THAT RIGOBERTA HAD TO BE BROUGHT DOWN TO EARTH.

people had been killed. The vast majority of them, according to several recent human-rights reports conducted by the Roman Catholic Church, U.S. monitors, and the UN's Commission for Historical Clarification, were Maya Indians, non-combatants killed by the army.

In 1988 and 1989 Stoll did fieldwork in Guatemala's Ixil Triangle, a remote area that had suffered frequent and particularly bloody conflict between the guerrillas and the army in the early 1980s. Stoll found that the Indians were hardly committed. The Maya—who account for about half of Guatemala's ten million people—were indeed poor, oppressed, and almost completely excluded from the urban ladino (white or mixed-blood) class that held power. But the Indians also possessed complex societies of their own: They were more attached to their local and linguistic communities than to any externally-assigned "Maya" identity, they were modernizing and attempting to create political space for themselves, and they had many tiers of status, wealth, and property ownership within their communities.

Stoll's dissertation, revised and published as *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (Columbia, 1993), contended that while many Maya had indeed supported the guerrillas, they had either been coerced to do so or simply determined that, compared with the homicidal army, the leftists were the lesser of two evils. When armed outsiders appeared in the highlands in the late 1970s, Stoll suggested, existing divisions in Ixil society—family conflicts, status disputes, intervillage tensions—exploded into violence. Both the guerrillas and the army exploited these rifts, and both used brutality and intimidation to do so: The guerrillas hoped to increase their numbers and materiel support, while the army tried to impose neutrality on the Indians. But it was the Maya—caught between two armies—who really lost.

In June 1989, while conducting his dissertation research, Stoll stumbled on a revelation that would eventually inspire his book on Rigoberta. In her *testimonio*, Rigoberta relates the powerful story of her

brother's brutal death. She describes how her brother, who had been abducted weeks earlier by the army, was taken with other prisoners to the central square of a town called Chajul. There, while Rigoberta watched, army officers doused the prisoners with gasoline and burned them alive. While researching in Chajul, Stoll asked several villagers about the event. No one, they insisted, had ever been burned alive in the town square.

At the time, Stoll put this information aside. "I did what any sensible graduate student would do," he writes, "I dropped the subject and scuttled back to my dissertation." But Stoll had become suspicious, and he decided to look further into the matter. "It was only later, back in the United States, that I realized I would have to face the authority of Rigoberta's story. An unimportant discrepancy, over how her brother died in Chajul, was the first sign of a more significant one: the considerable gap between the voices of revolutionary commitment incarnated by Rigoberta and the peasant voices I was listening to."

On the rare occasion when Stoll did talk about what he had found, he did so off the record. But at the 1991 Latin American Studies Association conference in Washington, D.C., a literary critic and friend of Rigoberta's made his findings public. "Reactions were horrified," Stoll says. The field of Latin American studies is, by and large, deeply sympathetic to Latin American guerrilla movements and indigenous peoples, and it was certainly sympathetic to Rigoberta. Everyone understood that *I, Rigoberta Menchú* was a highly politicized account, but at the same time it was treated with kid gloves by those reluctant to deny Rigoberta a voice. She had become such a powerful and persuasive symbol of indigenous resistance and integrity to many of these scholars that a challenge to her credibility, however small, was inconceivable.

From Stoll's perspective, this brook-no-criticism reverence was pernicious: "Her version of events has been so attractive for well-intentioned foreigners that it has overshadowed other peasant, Maya perspectives," he says. Stoll was concerned that Rigoberta's account—in which the Indians

find their land appropriated by ladinos and are forced into seasonal wage labor, thus making them natural allies of the guerrillas—served the political interests of the left while ignoring those of the Maya, whose own political organizations remained at arm's length from the guerrillas. Certainly Rigoberta's story flatly contradicted Stoll's belief that the Maya were caught between two armies. Now that Stoll knew that at least part of it was patently untrue, he set out to put the record straight. Although colleagues told him that continuing his investigation would be professional suicide, Stoll decided that a reckoning was necessary: Rigoberta had to be brought down to earth.

Over the next several years, he spent considerable stretches of time in the area where Rigoberta grew up. He interviewed more than 120 people, either in Spanish or—with the help of Barbara Bocek, a Stanford-trained anthropologist who was doing rural development work as well as researching peasant reactions to the war—in the local language, K'iche'. What he learned contradicted in sometimes dramatic ways many of the details of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. In 1997 Stoll completed his manuscript and sent it to Rigoberta. He got no response.

At the same time, Rigoberta, perhaps out of concern over Stoll's investigation, began to distance herself from the book that ostensibly contained her life story. She had not actually authored *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, she pointed out. She had dictated her story to an anthropologist, who had subsequently edited the transcripts (and quarreled with Rigoberta over the profits). As published, Rigoberta declared in 1997, the finished product "does not belong to me morally, politically, or economically." Then, in *Crossing Borders* (Verso, 1998), Rigoberta took further pains to modify some of her biographical details already in print.

At this point, Stoll could not find anyone who wanted to publish his book. He says that one editor informed him that the topic was not worthy of an academic press and that he "should try *Vogue* magazine."

Columbia and California (which had published earlier books by Stoll) and Stanford (his alma mater) turned him down, despite his previous books' relatively strong sales and the virtual guarantee of an even better performance by the controversial new work. Finally, Westview, a Boulder, Colorado-based academic imprint, agreed to take the book on. It was the thirty-first publisher Stoll had approached.

So what had Stoll said? His central argument (which no one refutes) was that *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is an intensely political document designed with ideological objectives in mind—specifically, bringing international attention to widespread human-rights abuses in Guatemala and generating support for the leftist opposition there. To do this, Rigoberta presented herself as an Every-Maya, incorporating the experiences of others into her own story. She witnessed events she could not have seen and suffered injustices she could not have known firsthand. Rigoberta presented her family as the impoverished victims of ruthless, government-backed ladino landowners. Stoll found out that Rigoberta's father was not a poor peasant who was radicalized by his quarrels with rich ladinos but a relatively well-off farmer who cultivated his land with help from Peace Corps advisers. Nor was Rigoberta completely uneducated, as she claimed: Stoll discovered that she had attended a Catholic school in Guatemala City. Furthermore, her schooling, according to Stoll's figuring, would have made it highly unlikely for her to have worked on the coastal farms, as she had recounted.

More generally, Stoll charged that Rigoberta's distortions served the purposes of a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla movement that did not necessarily take the interests of rural indigenous people to heart. By "making armed struggle sound like an inevitable reaction to oppression, at a time when Mayas were desperate to escape the violence," Stoll alleged, "*I, Rigoberta Menchú* became a way to mobilize foreign support for a wounded, retreating insurgency." In the mid-80s, the leftists refused to stop fighting a war that they had already lost, callously knowing that the Maya were the ones suffering the property destruction and casualties. Just as pointedly, Stoll insisted that the left bore considerable responsibility for starting the rural violence in the late 1970s and that the army was essentially reacting—albeit with brutal excess—to the guerrillas.

RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ



RUDI BLAHA/AP/WORLD WIDE PHOTOS

These stances did little to endear Stoll to solidarity and human-rights activists who saw the guerrillas, for all their brutality, as the only plausible counterweight to a national security-obsessed terrorist state. Rigoberta, for all her shortcomings, was seen as almost single-handedly responsible for bringing international attention to Guatemala's human-rights record and thus for the pressure that eventually brought about the UN-brokered peace accord. Stoll had taken a bold risk: He wished to challenge the assumptions and worldviews of human-rights activists and guerrilla sympathizers without challenging their belief that the army was responsible for most of the actual killing. Of course, the left's case against the government was largely made in terms of "structural violence"—militarization of power, refusal to grant the opposition any political space, institutionalized economic disparity—while Stoll focused on the more specific matter of who fired the first shots in the rural highlands. In the polarized world of Latin American academics and politics, it was perhaps inevitable that the details and subtleties of Stoll's arguments would be drowned out by louder voices (his own included).

Last fall, in an effort to assuage Stoll's early concerns about "giving ammunition to the enemy," Westview sent out review copies of *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* to a selective audience that did not include the right-wing press. At the same time, Stoll authored a provocative, anti-P.C. polemic for the book's dust jacket that was virtually tailor-made for conservative writers. And in the book's splashy and excerpt-friendly preface and final chapter, Stoll departed significantly from his stated purpose of reexamining *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. He waxed at some length about his categorical opposition to armed guerrilla movements and his extreme distaste for their romantic leftist allies abroad.

The only response to Westview's publicity campaign was from Larry Rohter, the Latin American bureau chief of *The New York Times*. Rohter did his own independent investigation using Stoll's sources and others. His research confirmed Stoll's claims about Rigoberta. Faced with the threat of a publicity nightmare, Rigoberta—in statements peppered with denunciations of the racist campaign to "make liars of all the victims" and protestations that concentrating on the "little details" of her life was undignified—conceded that some of the charges leveled at her story were indeed

true, offered alternate explanations for others, and ignored the rest.

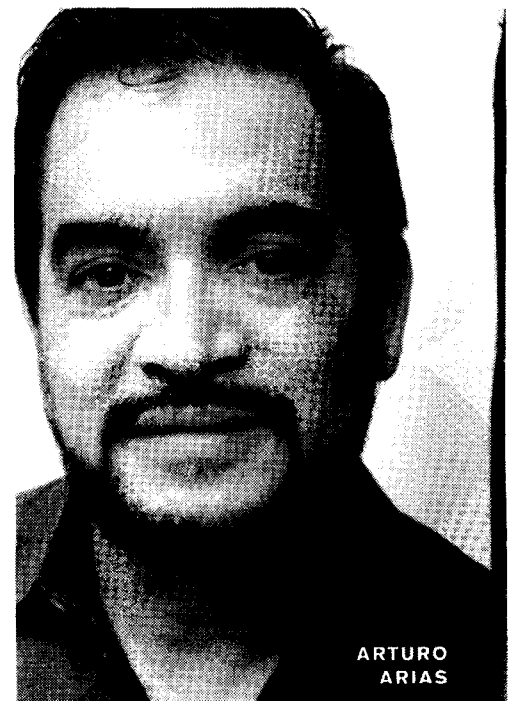
IN THE academic world and the human rights community, Stoll's enemies are numerous and highly vocal. Arturo Arias, a Guatemalan novelist who teaches cultural studies at San Francisco State University, has led the charge. "Stoll did a reductive analysis," says Arias, who is editing a collection on the subject titled *The Properties of Words: Rigoberta Menchú, David Stoll, and Identity Politics in Latin America* that is tentatively scheduled for publication by the University of Minnesota Press in early 2000. "And now everything Rigoberta's *testimonio* defends becomes tainted, and it becomes the basis for undermining the credibility of what happened—genocide, massacres, personal losses for many people. It became a whitewashing of history that is similar to discourses that deny the Holocaust." (Ironically, Stoll's rebuttal to his right-wing "allies" at *The New York Post* took the same tack, suggesting that the paper's downplaying of the Guatemalan military's crimes verged on "the Central American equivalent of Holocaust denial.")

In the monthly column he writes for *El Periódico de Guatemala*, Arias is especially unforgiving. "Only the stupid gringos of the right or left—Puritans all—could really believe that what they were seeing [in *I, Rigoberta Menchú*] was absolute truth," he fumed in January 1999. "The defense is not to analyze the nature of the text itself to confirm supposed 'truths' or 'lies' as if this were a courtroom TV drama, but rather, to question why [we] grant more credibility to the prejudiced Protestant opinion of a third-person anthropologist who is male, white, tall, and gringo, than to a Nobel laureate with a proven record of dedication in defense of the oppressed, whose only sin is to be female, short, of color, and Guatemalan."

Arias fulminates that "for Stoll the Mayas are essentially objects, not human beings. Stoll would not care a whit if all the Mayas died of hunger, or if they disappeared off the map. For him what matters is (1) to figure as a 'public intellectual' despite his mediocre academic credentials, (2) to guarantee the defeat of Marxism and socialism in general, and the [Guatemalan guerrillas] in particular, and (3) to advance his Protestant crusade." But Arias's most far-fung accusation is that Stoll "interrogated—excuse me, 'interviewed'—informants in

the presence of armed soldiers." (Stoll vehemently denies this, and Barbara Bocek—Stoll's traveling companion—says categorically, "There was no involvement, authorization, assistance, or oversight at any time by anyone from the armed forces.") However spurious, such charges have found some purchase on the Guatemalan left because of the widespread perception that the military and its defenders feel vindicated by Stoll's book.

Many North American scholars are no less critical of Stoll. His work on both the Maya and Rigoberta depends heavily on interviews conducted as an outsider, a strategy that reminds academics of his journalistic



background and raises the suspicions of anthropologists who prefer to rely on observation and immersion in a culture. But even granting the validity of the interviews, many scholars are concerned about how much time Stoll spent with his subjects, how he presented himself, and how well he understood the way Maya speak—or do not speak—about the violence. Paul Yamauchi, a sociology Ph.D. candidate at Cornell and the founder and former director of the International Center for Human Rights Research, spent ten years studying human-rights abuses and has conducted thousands of interviews with both Maya and ladinos. "I am horrified to see what Stoll did," he says. His practice of conducting interviews in a *peñón* that he himself describes as a "ladino and gringo-controlled environ-



RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ IN BURMA, 1993

ARTURO ARIAS CHARGES THAT "ONLY THE STUPID GRINGOS" COULD BELIEVE THAT RIGOBERTA'S BOOK WAS "ABSOLUTE TRUTH."

ment," his admitted lack of familiarity with "the intimate details of [village] life," and his failure to work "in the native tongue of most of the population" all conspire, Yamauchi argues, to undermine Stoll's supposedly objective results. Furthermore, Yamauchi contends that Stoll's lack of familiarity with Maya social conduct led him to do his interviews in public spaces, a fatal error in his research. "No one will give you accurate information about how they feel unless you meet in secrecy," Yamauchi says. "In my experience, anyone who is interviewed in a public space will say they were not for the guerrillas or the army—exactly Stoll's thesis."

Carlota McAllister, a Johns Hopkins graduate student who has recently completed two years of fieldwork in Guatemala,

seconds this claim. "It is impossible to ask a more loaded question in the Guatemalan highlands than 'To what degree did you willingly support the guerrillas?' Not least because it's the question soldiers would ask prior to beginning a massacre or a torture session," she says. "In my community, the same people can easily give me ten radically different answers to that question, depending on how I ask them and how well they know me. Stoll's big thing is 'just the facts,' but he confuses people's subsequent interpretations of their experience with strictly referential statements." On points of interpretation such as these, Stoll acknowledges that there is only so much any outsider can know—a problem compounded by the fact that anyone who was available to talk to him had reached

some sort of accommodation with the army. "I did the best I could do," he says.

There are other problems with Stoll's argument, problems that do not require any specialized knowledge to spot. For example, Stoll notes with regret that there is little documentation for many of the statements he sought to confirm, then goes on to cite that very lack of evidence as a symptom of a falsehood. Stoll allows that in guerrilla warfare, inevitably, "the main source of knowledge is rumor." But to contend that Rigoberta's father was not the peasant leader and activist that Rigoberta claims, Stoll writes, "If there is a single publication that claims [her father] as a member, I have yet to find it."

Furthermore, the broad claims in Stoll's conclusion rely on some sleight of hand. He is eager to make sweeping statements about the nature of rural insurgencies ("at bottom rural guerrilla strategies are an urban romance, a myth propounded by middle-class radicals who dream of finding true solidarity in the countryside"), the international left ("it is time to face the fact that guerrilla strategies are far more likely to kill off the left than build it"), and Guatemalan society ("Guatemalans are also less likely [than Menchú's foreign admirers] to feel the need to vindicate the left's tradition of armed struggle, just as few of them wish to justify the Guatemalan right's history of repression"). But evidence for these speculative claims eludes him: His book, after all, is a study of a particular region.

IF STOLL'S book has prompted an avalanche of criticism from Latin Americanists, it has earned the cautious support of other scholars. Most notable among them is Dartmouth College's John Watanabe, a cultural anthropologist who has shuttled back and forth between the United States and Guatemala for twenty years and whose research and analysis are respectfully cited by everyone from Arturo Arias to Stoll himself.

Watanabe basically agrees with Stoll's between-two-armies thesis, and has few doubts as to why Stoll has taken so much heat: "The left denounces Stoll's book and Stoll personally, because he has gored their sacred cow of a heroic revolutionary guerrilla-fighter-cum-martyr." The critics, he says, discount the possibility that in the late 1970s armed insurgency was not the only option and that it was the violence itself that closed off whatever nonviolent

ROBERT CARLSEN NOTES THAT “LOST IN ALL THE CRITIQUES OF STOLL’S BOOK IS THE FACT THAT IT IS THE MOST DAMNING TOME TO DATE ON THE GUATEMALAN ARMY.”

alternatives were available. Watanabe also takes issue with the sanctimonious tone of much of the criticism, saying, “I find it ironic that some who would stand by Ms. Menchú’s narrative, right or wrong, in the name of multiculturalism would be the first to suspect such an authoritative, homogeneous voice in the work of a colleague.”

More substantively, Watanabe believes that there is a basic misunderstanding at work. He thinks that Stoll’s critics are mistakenly applying their knowledge of Guatemala’s urban guerrilla conflicts to a rural context. “The injustices and repression against organizing, let alone mobilizing, the urban poor and the powerless go back a long way,” he explains, “and the guerrilla movements arising in the early 1960s most certainly did not start the killing, much less provoke the repression. For urban leftists who have this history in mind, to hear anyone say that the guerrillas ‘started’ the violence anywhere in Guatemala amounts to blasphemy. Indeed, this viewpoint is what made Rigoberta’s *testimonio* so powerful and persuasive to the left and its supporters: It related a parallel rural experience of inequality, injustice, violence, and political radicalization that mirrors their own largely urban experience.”

Robert Carlsen of the University of Colorado at Denver sees a significance to Stoll’s book that has been lost on both its friends and foes: “Had his critics really read the book, they could realize that Stoll actually casts Menchú in a sympathetic light.” Carlsen, whose fieldwork also essentially concurs with the between-two-armies thesis, is further frustrated by leftist attacks and rightist celebrations because “lost in all the critiques of Stoll’s new book is the fact that it is the most damning tome to date on the Guatemalan army.” As Stoll explains, “What I heard [in Guatemala] was almost more awful than what so many have read in [*I, Rigoberta Menchú*], where at least campesinos die for a cause that is their own. What I heard about was a preemptive slaughter of peasants who had little or nothing to do with the guerrillas.”

Even those sympathetic to Stoll take occasional issue with him, often noting his confrontational and journalistic tone.

Watanabe wonders at Stoll’s “readiness to bait the left,” while Carlsen says, with a politic smirk, Stoll “might have been advised to frame his arguments in less polemical ways.” And to a person, everyone feels that the timing of Stoll’s book—intentional or not—was awful. At the moment when the February 1999 UN report was about to hold the Guatemalan military accountable for its genocidal policies, why encourage the media to give Rigoberta’s personal deceptions equal billing?

UNLIKELY as it may seem, Holocaust studies may provide a useful counterpoint to the Guatemalan case. An entire subfield of academic criticism has emerged in the last decade or so that focuses on the construction of memory in Holocaust testimonies. Discussing Holocaust survivors, Primo Levi wrote in *The Drowned and the Saved*: “The greater part of the witnesses...have ever more blurred and stylized memories, often, unbeknownst to them, influenced by information gained from later readings or the stories of others.” Few, if any, mainstream Holocaust scholars find such arguments threatening, because none of these critics questions the basic facts of the Holocaust (just as Stoll does not question the basic facts of the Guatemalan violence). If, however, someone were to devote years of research to finding factual lapses in the iconic Holocaust survival narrative of, say, an Elie Wiesel, the controversy would be considerable.

Guatemalan studies is clearly a different case. The country’s nightmare is not yet a generation in the past, and its perpetrators still exert a good deal of power. But the parallel is instructive: Is Stoll offering objective context to subjective memory to understand better what took place, or is he gratuitously smearing an essential symbol of terrible crimes? “I don’t like Rigoberta; I never have,” says Jorge Castañeda, a leading Mexican intellectual and the author of *Utopia Unarmed*, a landmark history of Latin America’s revolutionary left. “But she’s a symbol for some things—for the right

and the wrong reasons—and those things are important, and they don’t have a hell of a lot of symbols. Peasants. Indians. Women. Peasant Indian women. And I just don’t see the need to do a hatchet job on all of that.”

Then again, does an icon of Rigoberta’s celebrity and influence perhaps require our scrutiny all the more? “That a valuable symbol can be misleading is the paradox that obliged me to write this book,” Stoll contends. “In Guatemala, much of what needs to be debated about the last half century of revolution and counterrevolution, bloodshed and peacemaking, is still wrapped up in symbols that prevent frank discussion.” Moreover, he says, “The air of sacrilege about questioning the reliability of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* gives us reasons to do so.”

Watanabe agrees. “I ceased teaching [*I, Rigoberta Menchú*] a number of years ago,” he says, “precisely because I found that it rang true for students for all the wrong reasons, by playing on their romanticized stereotypes. Her story had the power to erase an entire term’s discussion of the more complex ways in which [Indian] communities could be both cooperative and divisive. Stoll’s book serves not simply to expose untruths told, but to ask why we find her truths so compelling.”

While his detractors contend that by debunking Rigoberta, Stoll is denying the Maya a voice, his defenders claim the opposite: “It seems to me,” says Barbara Bocek, “that he is the one arguing that all indigenous people, not just famous ones, have agency and authenticity.” As Stoll himself says, “Obviously, Rigoberta is a legitimate Maya voice. So are all the young Maya who want to move to Los Angeles or Houston. So is the man with a large family who owns three worn-out acres and wants me to buy him a chain saw so he can cut down the last forest more quickly.”

Stoll contends that Rigoberta embodies a neoromantic notion of an Indian: a subaltern noble savage. In the academic left’s eagerness to amplify her voice, it—and she—has refashioned her identity to fit its needs. Those needs, in Stoll’s view, pri-

marily involve bolstering the misguided cause of Ché Guevara-style revolutionary violence. Says Stoll, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* “enshrined a rationale for guerrilla warfare that continues to enchant the latte left long after it lost its appeal in rural Guatemala.” Stoll goes so far as to offer his work as a political corrective: “Facing the limitations of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* will, I hope, help the Latin American left and its foreign supporters escape from the captivity of Guevarismo.”

Ultimately, Stoll’s most powerful thesis—and his most troubling one—is that the Indians were trapped between two armies. In many respects, it’s an attractive idea, one grounded in empirical detachment and offered in profound sympathy with war’s innocent victims. The Vietnamese soldiers of the 1950s who yearn to go back to their farms and raise rice in Graham Greene’s novel *The Quiet American*, the Central American peasants who suffer at the hands of guerrillas and army alike in John Sayles’s film *Men With Guns*, and the dispossessed West Bank Palestinians in David Grossman’s reportage *The Yellow Wind* are all caught between two armies. It is Stoll’s allegiance to this thesis that

underpins everything in *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, and it is what makes his book more than an exposé of Rigoberta’s inaccuracies. To the contrary: His certainty that the Maya were tragically manipulated encourages him to extrapolate his case studies—whether in the Ixil Triangle or of Rigoberta’s life—into a universal parable of political error.

But if the between-two-armies thesis can reveal crucial and neglected facts, it can also be used to obscure injustice and brutality. A Guatemalan army officer once said of the violence, “The poor Indians, they didn’t get involved in anything. They were between two armies.” Stoll never acknowledges that the government helped to create the Mayas’ unhappy predicament, and his failure in this regard is easy to read as a tacit endorsement of the status quo. Castañeda—himself a vocal critic of both Rigoberta and the revolutionary left—puts it this way: “Stoll might be right. The Indians might have been caught between two armies.” But this political stance, he says, “comes from the right. You had thirty—not to say five hundred—years of the rulers beating the shit out of the Indians. And the left tried to help the Indians, and the right fought

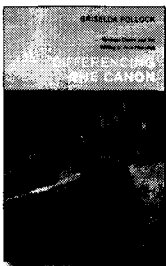
back very intelligently and made it clear to the Indians that the cost would be horrible. What is missing from Stoll is the realization that in a guerrilla war, counterinsurgency strategy is precisely to place noncombatants between two armies. It’s exactly what you’re after.”

It is Stoll’s refusal—however noble his intentions—to consider the political context of his words that has most frustrated his enemies and even some of his potential allies. Most academics aspire to a level of detachment; they wish to critique left and right and, in so doing, rise above politics. But Stoll’s efforts to convince others of his detachment have so far proven largely futile. Faced with activists and colleagues who see no neutral intellectual ground in Guatemala, it is no wonder that Stoll has become a cause célèbre for the right, a whipping boy for the left, and an albatross for many of those who navigate in between.

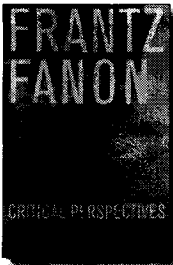
Hal Cohen, a former graduate student in Latin American history, is a writer living in Brooklyn. His article “A Secret History of the Sexual Revolution” appeared in the March issue of LF.

EXPLORING

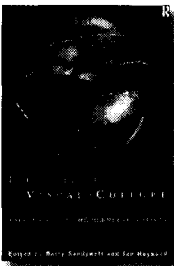
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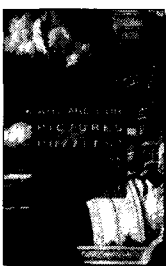
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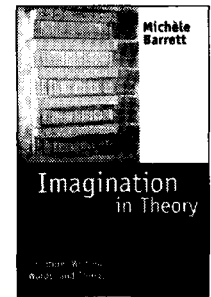
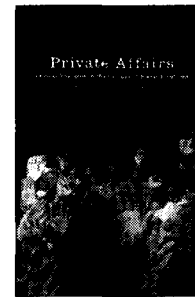
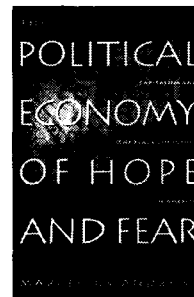
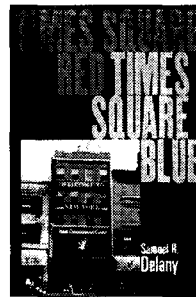
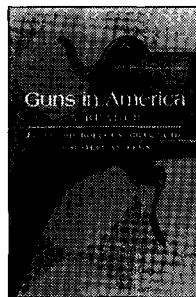
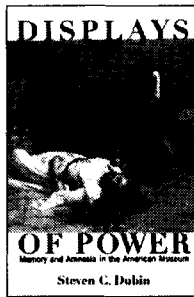
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John Rawls. It does not have the feel of an important book. Its language is often blunt and lifeless; certain phrases—"a well-ordered constitutional democracy," "the fact of reasonable pluralism," "the criterion of reciprocity"—seem to crop up again and again, as if part of a strangely unpoetic mantra. For the most part its chapter titles are dry and academic: "Reply to Alexander and Musgrave"; "A Kantian Conception of Equality." Its arguments seem remote; they are certainly difficult.

Yet the publication of Rawls's *Collected Papers* (Harvard) is an important event. Since the appearance of his epoch-making *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, Rawls has been acknowledged as America's—perhaps the world's—leading political philosopher. His opus has sold more than 200,000 copies worldwide. On a conservative estimate,

about five thousand books or articles dealing with it, at least in some respect, have been written. The story of “How John Rawls Revived Political Philosophy and Rejuvenated Liberalism” is part of academic legend.

As a result, you might think that Rawls would be a familiar figure—that his reputation would have seeped beyond the academic world. Yet nearly thirty years after the publication of *A Theory of Justice*, almost nothing is known about him except that he is an emeritus professor at Harvard University. Nor is it obvious that his ideas have had much of an impact on the “real” world. Ironically, Rawls’s successful revival of liberalism in political theory coincided with the decline of liberalism as a political movement in America.

Rawls is a sophisticated and ambitious thinker. His arguments are informed by a deep sense of history and draw on an array of different disciplines. Still, as Isaiah Berlin was fond of saying, underlying most great philosophical systems there is a fairly simple set of ideas. This is true of Rawls. Almost everything he has written is animated by an urgent concern with reviving and extending a neglected liberal tradition—the tradition of rights-based social-contract thinking.

At the center of Rawls’s system is the inviolability of basic civil and political rights. He believes, following his hero Kant, that the most distinctive feature of human nature is our ability freely to choose our own ends. Our most fundamental duty in dealing with our fellow citizens is to respect this capacity for autonomy: to let others live by their own lights; to treat them, in Kant’s famous phrase, “as ends not as means.” Rawls accordingly gives priority to the “right” over the “good”—to claims based on the rights of individuals over claims based on the good that might result from violating those rights. But unlike libertarian advocates of inviolable property rights, Rawls insists that taking rights seriously means taking social equality seriously—he is, indeed, a more radical egalitarian theorist than is generally acknowledged, one considerably to the left of traditional welfare-state liberals, not to mention Clintonesque New Democrats.

RAWLS HIMSELF IS

an extraordinarily private, self-reliant man. He has long since withdrawn his name from *Who’s Who*, declines honorary degrees, and refuses to be interviewed. When I wrote to him to request an interview, I received a cryptic but touching reply: “I am sorry, but I have not been well, and for that and other reasons I am unable to give an interview. I am sorry. Sincerely yours, John Rawls.” His friends were willing to talk to me, but they were universally cautious and reserved. I understood how Ian Hamilton must have felt in attempting to write the life of another shy New England writer—J.D. Salinger.

For all his restraint, Rawls has exercised a great influence on those who come into personal contact with him. Recently I spent ten days in New York City and Cambridge, Massachusetts, talking to people who know him. The experience was heartening. I telephoned the philosopher Rogers Albritton, an old friend of Rawls’s from the 1940s, who said: “My principal sense of Jack is of a man who has an incredibly fine moral sense in his dealings with other human beings. He is not just the author of a great book, he is a very admirable man. He is the best of us.” Albritton’s testimony was repeated again and again. One eminent philosopher (he did not want to be named) said: “I find it hard to express what I feel about Jack. He is a rare creature. He has a much more devel-

oped moral and social instinct than most people.” The same philosopher works with a portrait of the great man above his desk. Stories about Rawls’s moral and social instinct do, indeed, abound. One, possibly apocryphal, tells of how Rawls was attending a dissertation defense, when he noticed that the sun was shining in the candidate’s eyes. He got up and spent the rest of the session standing uncomfortably between the candidate and the sunlight.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Rawls’s system is its very radical attitude toward fate. It is not unreasonable to suppose that this attitude might have a source in his own life. It is the duty of society, Rawls believes, to ensure that our opportunities are as little affected by our circumstances as possible. It is not that he believes that social institutions have to ensure that everyone is as happy as everyone else—that is our own responsibility. But he does insist that, as far as possible, we should all be given similar opportunities to achieve happiness—that our family upbringing, our looks and health, even our abilities and talents, should not be allowed to give us an unfair advantage in life. Life will contain its afflictions and troubles, Rawls seems to say, without unjust institutions worsening our lot. This, it might be pointed out, is a recognizable left-wing conviction, but in Rawls’s case it was not the product of a deprived upbringing. Instead, it seems to be the outcome of a life which has been full of very good luck or of very close shaves. “He has,” as one former student put it, “an unusually strong sense of ‘there but for the grace of God go I.’”

John Borden Rawls was born in 1921 into a rich Baltimore family, the second of five sons. His father, William Lee Rawls, was a successful tax lawyer and constitutional expert. His mother, Anna Abell Stump, from a distinguished German family, was a feminist and president of the local League of Women Voters. Isaiah Berlin, an admirer, used to say that he couldn’t but see Rawls as a Puritan “in a tall black hat,” and it is true that there is something deeply puritan in his austere, aspiring life. Yet other friends point out that Rawls comes from an old Southern family and has a patrician sense of noblesse oblige.

Rawls appears to have given only one interview in the course of his career, and that to a small Harvard-based magazine. The only other significant source for information on his life is the first chapter of Thomas Pogge’s book *John Rawls*, which was published in

German in 1994. Rawls described to Pogge the formative experience of his early life: the deaths of two of his younger brothers, one from diphtheria, the other from pneumonia, both illnesses they contracted from Rawls himself. Joshua Cohen, a former student, says that these anguishing events are reflected in *A Theory of Justice* in discussions of the “arbitrariness of fortune” and the “unmerited contingencies” of life. It was at about this time that Rawls developed his stutter, which he associates with his brothers’ deaths.

Rawls attended a public school in Baltimore for a while, but most of his high school years were spent at Kent, a strict, Episcopalian private school in Connecticut. According to Burton Dreben, a long-standing friend and colleague, Rawls went through a religious phase in prep school, and although he has not remained a believer in any conventional sense, the experience left its mark. As his later writings attest, he shows more feeling for religious values than most of his liberal-left colleagues.

Like his two remaining brothers, Rawls went to Princeton—in 1939 still very much what it had been in the days of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the northernmost outpost of a Southern gentleman. It was at Princeton, under the influence of Norman Malcolm, a friend and follower of Wittgenstein’s, that Rawls became interested in philosophy.

Finishing Princeton early, he joined the army and saw action in the Pacific, serving in New Guinea, the Philippines, and Japan. Rawls belonged to the cohort worst hit by the war—seventeen in his class at Princeton were killed, as were twenty-three members of the following year’s class. Dreben says that Rawls never talks about his experiences as a foot soldier but they were certainly horrific.

Rawls was still in the Pacific when, in August 1945, U.S. planes bombed Hiroshima. Fifty years later, he wrote an article for the political journal *Dissent* in which he argued that although in times of extreme crisis a liberal democratic regime waging a just war may attack enemy civilians, the U.S. army in 1945 was facing no such crisis; therefore, the firebombing of Japanese cities and the dropping of the atomic bomb were “very great wrongs.” The *Dissent* article is the only one Rawls has ever written tackling a concrete political issue. His willingness to write it may in part be explained by the fact that he was in Japan soon after the bombings and saw some of the consequences of what had been

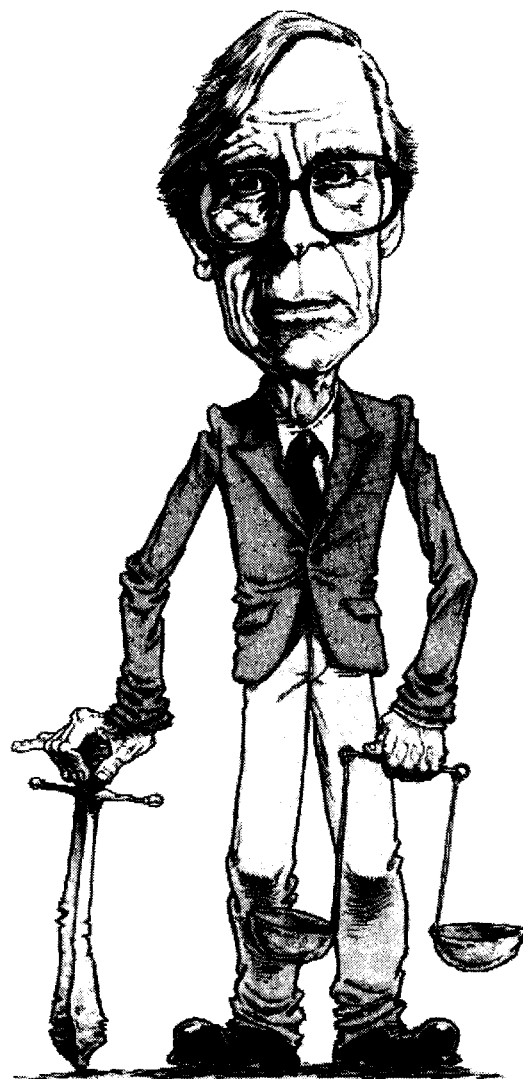
done. But Joshua Cohen suggests that something else also weighed on him: Rawls knew that if the bomb had not been dropped, he and his fellow soldiers would certainly have had to fight a conventional campaign in Japan. Once again Rawls was “lucky” to get away with his life, and perhaps burdened by the knowledge that an unjust act might have assured his survival.

Although he was offered the chance to become an officer, Rawls left the army early, as a private, in 1946. He returned to his alma mater to write a doctoral dissertation in moral philosophy. In his last year as a graduate student, 1949–1950, he took a course in political theory; it was then that he formed the idea of writing a treatise on justice. *A Theory of Justice* was twenty years in the making.

In 1949 Rawls married Margaret Fox, a graduate fresh from Brown, and they have had five children. She became a painter; Rawls—himself a connoisseur of painting, especially American painting—has often sat for her. The couple spent their first summer together drawing up an index for a book on Nietzsche by Walter Kaufmann. Rawls also compiled the index to *A Theory of Justice*, and it is a masterpiece of the art. Indeed, his thoroughness is the stuff of legends. The liberal legal theorist Ronald Dworkin remembers a midnight conversation in the deserted bar of the Santa Lucia hotel in Naples in June 1988. He, Rawls, and one or two others were having a fruitful discussion about Rawls’s later work. In the middle of the exchange, Rawls halted the conversation, asked no one to talk while he was gone, retrieved from his room a yellow pad, and returned to the wine-stained tablecloth to take notes. “No one else,” Dworkin says with a chuckle, “would have done it.”

Princeton, it seems, failed to recognize Rawls’s genius. On his return from a year at Oxford in 1953, Rawls joined his old mentor Norman Malcolm at Cornell, in a philosophy department that was emerging as one of the best in the United States. At Oxford he had already begun to formulate some of his most original notions, although the real breakthrough came when he published the article “Justice as Fairness” in 1958. Rawls was in his mid-thirties; this was only his third article. Students remember, however, that by 1960 he was already using an early draft of *A Theory of Justice* as the basis for his seminars. He spent the next decade honing its arguments.

RAWLS INSISTS
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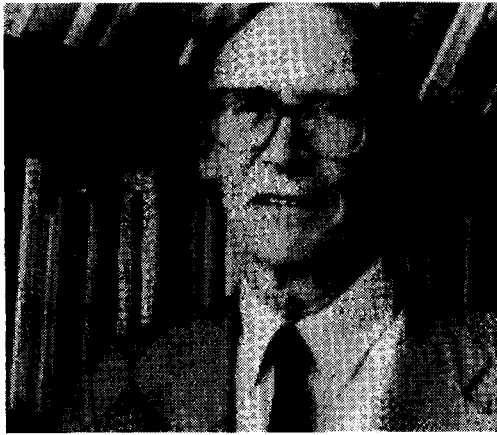
In the early 1960s, Rawls obtained a tenured position at MIT. Two years later, he moved to Harvard, where he has remained, living in the same large house in Lexington, Massachusetts, for almost forty years.

Vietnam provoked the same conflicts at Harvard as everywhere else. One of the philosophy department's leading lights, W.V. Quine, was a staunch conservative; another, Hilary Putnam, was a Maoist. From the beginning, Rawls was opposed to the war and made his opposition known. He participated in an antiwar conference in Washington and, back at Harvard, taught a course on international law as it applied to Vietnam. He also campaigned against the 2S deferment, which allowed students "in good standing" to have their call-ups deferred. According to Rogers Albritton: "Both of us thought that it was wrong that the sons of the privileged should be allowed to stay out and accumulate grades, while someone who wanted to start a filling station was sent off." In retrospect, Albritton sees the irony in their position: "There was something a bit bizarre about saying we were against the war, but our students should go to fight in it."

Rawls seems to have been unprepared for the success of *A Theory of Justice*: "I thought I would publish it and some friends might read it," he told the *Harvard Review of Philosophy*. "I had been writing it for a long time, so I would finally get it off my desk and then do something else." But despite his intellectual stardom, Rawls's life remained that of an anonymous, hard-working academic.

TO UNDERSTAND

what is most radical, and most noteworthy, in Rawls's theory of justice, we must contrast it with some of its rivals. First among them is utilitarianism—the doctrine that we ought to maximize the total amount of well-being in a society regardless of how evenly that well-being is distributed. There was much that Rawls admired in the utilitarian thought of Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and their intellectual descendants. It had the scope and rigor he wanted for his own theory and a good track record as a progressive principle, inspiring directly or indirectly a great deal of social and political reform. Yet it had one flaw: It did not take human rights seriously. Utilitarians might maintain that the general good will usually be served by respecting human



RAWLS'S LIFE STORY MAY UNDERLIE HIS STRONG CONCERN ABOUT THE "ARBITRARINESS OF FORTUNE."

rights, but they are committed to the position that when a conflict between individual rights and general well-being arises, it is the claims of the latter that should prevail. Thus, the greatest-happiness principle could have permitted slavery. Or, more to the point, it could be used to defend what is often said to be an unstated principle of the modern market economy: that in the battle for low wages and low inflation, the well-being of some is sacrificed for the good of the rest.

Utilitarianism is the first target of Rawls's criticisms, but there are others. Although *A Theory of Justice* has little to say about Marxism, that creed was alive and well when Rawls was working on his book; and like utilitarians, Marxists tend to regard the notion of natural human rights as nonsense. Finally, Rawls challenges various "perfectionist" and communitarian theories—theories that look to the state to advance a single value system. Here Rawls has in mind the political ideals of fundamentalist Christianity and Islam, or indeed of those American communitarians who urge the state to promote the virtues of church attendance and family preservation.

These philosophies all permit the sacrifice of human rights to some other good—to utility, the interests of the proletariat, or some religious ideal of the good life. It is as an alternative to these theories that Rawls champions the social contract. Society is, of course, involuntary and our place in it largely beyond our control, but Rawls asks what arrangements people would consent to if society were freely entered into.

To this end, Rawls suggests a thought experiment, asking us to imagine ourselves in his now famous "original position." People in this position are situated behind what he calls a veil of ignorance. They are denied knowledge of everything that makes them who they are: class, skills, age, gender,

sexuality, religious views, and conception of the good life. Rawls argues that the principles these imaginary people would choose to regulate their relations with one another are the principles of justice.

An enormous amount of ink has been spilled in explaining, attacking, and defending the original position, but the thinking behind it is plain enough. The veil of ignorance is meant to ensure that our views on justice are not distorted by our own interests. Such distortions occur all the time. As Rawls puts it, "If a man knew that he was wealthy, he might find it rational to advance the principle that various taxes for welfare measures be counted unjust; if he knew that he was poor, he would most likely propose the contrary principle."

Rawls believes, contentiously, that if we were placed in the original position, we would choose to pursue a low-risk strategy and agree to principles that are basically egalitarian—principles that guarantee the highest possible minimum levels of freedom, wealth, and opportunity, even at the cost of lowering average levels. More particularly, Rawls suggests that we would elect to be governed by two general principles, the first concerning liberty, the second the distribution of wealth and power.

The first point on which men and women in the original position would agree is the importance of guaranteeing their freedom to live as they see fit. According to this principle, each person should have a right to the most extensive basic liberties (the right to vote, freedom of thought, and so on) compatible with a like liberty for others. Rawls contends that the state should remain neutral on conceptions of the good life and simply safeguard the freedoms that allow us to proceed according to our own values. This principle does little more than offer a more

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general guarantee of the freedoms protected by the First Amendment.

Rawls's second principle, however, is more unusual. The "difference principle" states that social and economic inequalities are acceptable only insofar as they benefit the least advantaged. The best way of understanding this principle is as a radical alternative to the principle of equality of opportunity. Proponents of equal opportunity argue for a market society in which people who have the same talents, and a similar willingness to use them, enjoy the same prospects of success. Rawls, however, argues not only that it is wrong that our lot should be determined by our class or educational opportunities, but that it is

equally unjust that our position should be determined by our talents. These, just as much as the class positions of our parents, are the outcome of what he describes as a "natural lottery."

Rawls's point is echoed in other critiques of meritocracy: It seems unfair that simply because someone is especially strong, intelligent, or dexterous, he or she should have a higher standard of living than someone with less marketable skills. The natural lottery argument jettisons the notion that anyone "deserves" the rewards they gain from work and often turns into an argument for equality of income. But Rawls says that there is a better way of dealing with the unfair distribution of abilities: by

allowing those inequalities that benefit the worst off. Rawls does little to explain which inequalities he believes would benefit the worst off. But he appears to imply that if paying doctors more than nurses, or CEOs more than production-line workers, could be shown to be of advantage to the poorest members of a society by encouraging, say, the development of rare and important gifts, then these practices are justified. Otherwise they are not. Rawls argues that unlike the inequalities we see all around us, inequalities based on the difference principle would not be felt by the less well-off as unmerited or degrading.

To its admirers, *A Theory of Justice* showed that left-wing liberalism was not an incoherent mishmash of socialist and capitalist values but an intellectually respectable political philosophy. Liberals admired Rawls's emphasis on the inviolability of individual freedoms, while leftists appreciated his condemnation of nearly all forms of economic inequality.

But the book's impact also has something to do with the fact that it was published at a time when political philosophy was on the defensive. The dominant philosophical currents—logical positivism and linguistic philosophy—were hostile to large-scale moral theorizing; the extravagances of Marxism and fascism had given ideology—even liberal ideology—a bad name. Ronald Dworkin explains: "The 1950s were a complacent period, and there was a feeling that the United States was on the right path. Then the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement cast doubt on all that. Here suddenly was a book that raised all the issues—it gave people a way of arguing about these questions that suddenly seemed so important."

IF THE MEASURE OF the importance of a work lies not only in the amount of agreement it elicits but also in the quality of its opposition, then Rawls's book is important indeed. There is scarcely a page in it that has not been criticized; there are utilitarian, feminist, conservative, libertarian, Catholic, communitarian, Marxist, and Green critiques of Rawls's work. Michael Sandel, a professor of government at Harvard who made his name as one of Rawls's critics, distinguishes three stages in the book's reception. First it sparked a debate about utilitarianism. "Rawls fairly clearly won that debate," says Sandel; rights-oriented, anti-utilitarian lib-

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eralism is now the philosophical orthodoxy. The next argument, in the late 1970s, took place within rights-oriented liberalism and pitted Rawls's brand of liberal egalitarianism against the sort of right-wing libertarian views that found their most powerful voice in Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. This debate, Sandel says, "corresponds roughly to the debate in American politics between defenders of the market economy and advocates of the welfare state." There is a sweet irony in the fact that the egalitarian position should have been defended by Rawls, a wealthy WASP, and the libertarian one by Nozick, a poor Jew from Brooklyn.

The last and longest running of the arguments has been between Rawlsian liberals and communitarians, including Sandel, Michael Walzer, Benjamin Barber, and the Canadian Charles Taylor. (One of Rawls's communitarian critics, William Galston, has served as a domestic policy adviser to Bill Clinton.) This critique of liberalism revolves around the charge that Rawls's ideas are excessively individualistic. The communitarians claim that his work surreptitiously draws on an implausible view of individuals as free from all deep moral ties and thus bound only by ends and roles they choose for themselves. The fact is that most of what we value is a matter not of choice but of inheritance—what really matters is the sustenance of strong communities, where we can live according to the values in which we have been brought up. The communitarians also attack Rawls's ideal of a neutral state: In refusing to favor one vision of the good life over another, the Rawlsian state offers no support for the sort of strong communities we all need. Rawls's work is an apology for the weak, atomistic, relativistic culture we see all around us.

Rawls has responded to some of the criticisms by reworking his theory. He has published about fifteen articles since *A Theory of Justice* came out; six years ago, he collected some of them in revised form in *Political Liberalism*. At some point in the late 1970s, he came to realize that *A Theory of Justice* was in part inconsistent. It offered the ideal of a society in which individuals—Christians and Muslims, theists and atheists, heterosexuals and homosexuals, puritans and hedonists—could all live life according to their own conception of the good. Yet, as Rawls came to see it, his argument relied on a single conception of the good that

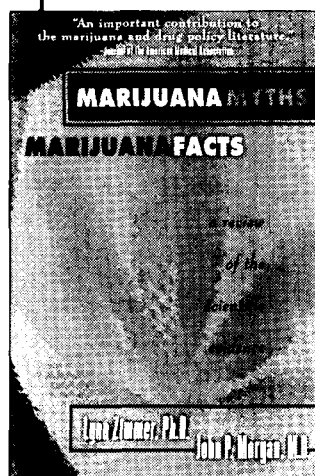
many citizens might reject: a Kantian version of a secular liberal outlook, according to which each of us has a right and a duty to search out our own good from the alternatives available to us. This will seem reasonable enough to a secular liberal, but it won't appeal to, say, a Roman Catholic; Catholicism teaches that a life spent following church tradition is superior to one spent ceaselessly exploring moral alternatives—it rates fidelity and submission over autonomy and experimentation. Rawls came to believe that while his just society would permit a great diversity of value systems, the argument he advanced for it would only ever appeal to those who accepted one set of values—those of secular liberalism.

As he has grown older, Rawls has come to recognize that many of the most powerful statements of principle within the liberal tradition do not rest on the sort of individualistic Kantian foundations he constructed in *A Theory of Justice*: Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Martin Luther King's Letter from Birmingham Jail champion liberal civil and political rights, but they invoke a religious worldview to do so. The main concern of Rawls's later work is to respond to this fact by recasting liberalism as a more modest and strictly political creed—one that appeals not to contentious views about God, morality, or the person but to the supposedly less contestable values of reciprocity, fairness, and mutual respect. In

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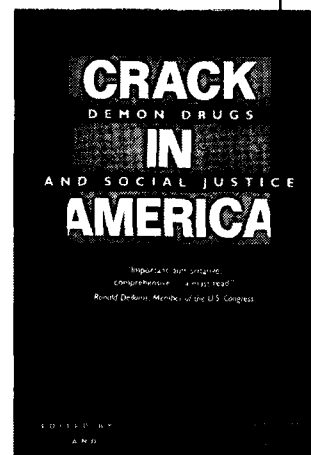
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this way, Rawls hopes, a conception of justice rooted in liberal values—equal political and civil liberty; a fair distribution of resources—can become the basis for an "overlapping consensus." Such a conception is especially needed in a society like the United States, where there is little agreement about fundamental moral questions.

In his recent work, Rawls has largely shifted his attention from questions of economic distribution to the political perplexities of a diverse, multicultural society. But that is not to say he is no longer concerned about inequality. Three years ago, the twenty-fifth anniversary of *A Theory of Justice* was marked by a large conference in Santa Clara, California. At the event, Rawls expressed his concerns about the concentration of wealth in the United States with surprising force. He was especially exercised by the way the lack of limits on political donations was distorting the political process; in Rawlsian terms, the value of political liberty is now almost infinitely greater for some than it is for others. "I think," says Joshua Cohen, "his hopefulness has been shaken by the world. His feelings have soured."

Two days after the conference, Rawls was struck by the first of a succession of severe strokes. He continues to work, although he is weaker than he was. The introduction to the paperback edition of *Political Liberalism*, finished after the strokes, has more passion than anything he has ever published. Similarly, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," published two years ago in *The University of Chicago Law Review*, includes a blunt criticism of the "curse of money." American politics, he believes, "has become dominated by corporate and other organized interests who through large contributions to campaigns distort if not preclude public discussion and deliberation." (This essay, together with a study of the relations among nation states, will be published by Harvard University Press as *The Law of Peoples* in November.)

Even Rawls's critics cannot deny that he has had an enormous impact on political theory; yet, as his own despair about politics in the United States suggests, his teachings have had very little influence on political debate more broadly. There are some qualifications to be made. It is said that *A Theory of Justice* has had an influence among dissidents in China and was seen at Tiananmen Square. On a literary level, Margaret Drabble's latest novel, *The Witch of Exmoor*, opens with its protagonists playing a game—

"The Veil of Ignorance"—in which they imagine themselves in the original position.

Still, most of the Rawlsians I spoke with confirmed that his ideas have had little impact in the United States. Rawls's principles remain extremely egalitarian, and he has argued that they could only be realized in "a liberal socialist regime" or a "property-owning democracy" in which ownership of wealth and capital is highly dispersed; they are not, he believes, compatible with a modern welfare state that "may allow large and inheritable inequalities of wealth." It is true that Clinton's New Democrats and Blair's New Labor are publicly committed to raising the income of the poor and reintegrating the excluded into society, but there is no suggestion that the earnings of the rich need be limited by this goal. The left-of-center parties now in power all over the West speak the language of community, rather than individual rights; of equality of opportunity, rather than equality of outcome; of meritocracy rather than the difference principle. For the moment at least, the egalitarianism that animated old-style socialism or social democracy and still animates Rawls's work appears to be dead as a political force. People don't care about equality anymore: They want good public services and they want to see a safety net for the weak, but they are also happy to see talent "rewarded." Few complain about the earnings of a Warren Buffett, a Steven Spielberg, a Michael Jordan; these are popular heroes.

Rawls's critics argue that this attests to the irrelevance of his ideas. His friends, on the other hand, tend to adopt a long-term perspective, arguing that his time will come—his ideas are just too powerful, too profound, not to have an effect. There is a third position, one perhaps occupied by Rawls himself in his bleaker moments: For all their importance, for all their power, his ideas are simply too radical—too many people have too much to lose. The development of a more global economy and the corresponding decline in the power of the nation-state have, if anything, made a Rawlsian state harder to achieve now, at the time of *Collected Papers*, than it would have been in 1971, when *A Theory of Justice* appeared—and it was hard enough then.

Ben Rogers is the author of *A.J. Ayer: A Life*, published in the U.K. by Chatto & Windus. A different version of this article appeared in the London-based monthly, *Prospect* magazine (www.prospect-magazine.co.uk).

continued from page 5

archaea, pleomorphism, and apoptosis. Furthermore, many scientists and physicians have independently verified Reich's findings on the emotional correlates to cancer. The widely used Pap test of George Papanicolaou, which looks for cancer cells in body secretions, uses a methodology first described in one of Reich's books years before the Pap test was developed.

And what about Reich's orgone energy? At my lab in Oregon, we routinely find that seedlings sprouted inside orgone accumulators grow at double the ordinary rate. Most people who sit in an accumulator can feel the strong penetrating energy, and many can even see it. More rigorous experiments have been done, repeatedly, such as the double-blind controlled studies of human physiological responses to the orgone accumulator (as compared to a dummy box) undertaken at the University of Marburg in 1986 and at the University of Vienna in 1995. Both studies corroborated Reich's findings. Today, Reich's orgone accumulator is used by physicians in Europe for successful treatment of degenerative illness, including cancer.

My own *Bibliography on Orgone Biophysics* contains approximately four hundred citations to published articles by about one hundred distinguished authors, all of whom confirm Reich's findings on different aspects of bions, orgone energy, the orgone accumulator, and even cloudbusting. I've personally confirmed much of Reich's atmospheric work with the cloudbuster, starting with my graduate research at the University of Kansas and continuing with fieldwork in the Negev, Kalahari, and Sahara deserts. The apparatus, properly used, can increase humidity and rains even in hyperarid environments.

Cohen's article was a wholesale misportrayal that repeated nearly every nasty rumor that has ever been printed about Reich. Cohen could hardly bring himself to speak critically of the FDA for its burning of Reich's books, perhaps because he has so solidly allied himself with the so-called skeptics who over the years have acted as both provocateurs and cheerleaders for the FDA book burning.

At the end of the article, Cohen takes a swipe at my institute, the Orgone

Biophysical Research Lab, which sponsors the Hochberg Awards program, providing small grants and awards to students who conduct genuine investigations of Reich's social findings. The referees for the Hochberg Awards do not demand slavish devotion to Reich, as Cohen's remarks suggest. However, they do demand clarity and accurate representations of Reich's work.

Sorry, but Mr. Cohen gets an F on his paper—and no Hochberg Award either!

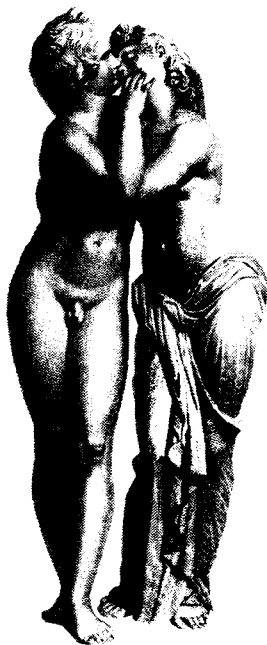
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CORRECTIONS

In "Did Jacob Go to China?" [Inside Publishing, May/June], we reported that Benjamin Braude, a professor of history at Boston College, believed a thirteenth-century Jew would have written in Hebrew rather than in Italian. In fact, Braude argues that the issue is not language but alphabet: A thirteenth-century Italian Jew would have written in his native Italian, but using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet rather than the Latin alphabet.

On page B30 of our April issue, we published a photograph of Betty Friedan. The credit for that photograph should have read simply, "Diana Mara Henry, 1978." Similarly, the photographs on page B32 should have been credited solely to the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.



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Columbia, SC; July 28–August 1, 1999

This conference will focus on reuniting the local and global in the urban world. Speakers will consider the cultural environment in which Hull-House flourished as well as the political, institutional, and visionary legacies of that environment. Speakers include William Ayres, Victoria Brown, Bernardine Dohrn, Shannon Jackson, David Montgomery, George Sanchez, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Deborah White. The conference will take place at the University of Illinois at Chicago and is sponsored by the Institute for the Humanities. For further information or to register, contact Linda Vavra, 701 S. Morgan, MC206, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL 60607-7040; T: (312) 996-6354; email: <lvavra@uic.edu>; Web site: www.uic.edu/depts/huminst/hullhouse.htm

Chicago, IL: September 17–18, 1999

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The 58th meeting of The English Institute will take up questions of temporality in a variety of contexts—literature (from the tenses of sentences to the time of literary periods), culture (from Medieval catastrophe to electronic cool), and history (from its theoretical impossibility to its continuing necessity). What notions of past, present, and future shape contemporary thinking? Participants at the conference include: Jonathan Arac, Jay Clayton, Samuel R. Delany, Jr., Louise O. Fradenburg, Catherine Gallagher, Marianne Hirsch, Jane A. Gallop, Barbara Johnson, Alan Liu, Wahneema Lubiano, Jerome J. McGann, Karen Newman, Stephen G. Nichols, Jennifer Wicke. For more information, please contact Monica Miller, The English Institute, Center for Literary and Cultural Studies, Harvard University, Barker Center, 12 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138; T: (617) 496-1006; email: <englinst@fas.harvard.edu>; Web site: www.fas.harvard.edu/~englinst.

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Minneapolis, MN: October 7–9, 1999

The University of Western Ontario presents "Paris-SubStance-USA: The Passage of Literary and Cultural Criticism." The first SubStance-UWO Conference will be held from 22-24 October, 1999 on the campus of the University of Western Ontario, London. Topics include: the historical context of French-American intellectual exchange; the American appropriation of French thought; the relevance of French thought to the education system in America; the losses and gains suffered by French theory in its transfer to "America;" the future of French thought; and the future of American literary theory and cultural criticism. Fifteen speakers will address issues raised in papers given by invited speakers: Marc Angenot, Françoise Gaillard, Martin Jay, Françoise Meltzer, Christopher Norris, Tiphaine Samoyault. The board of the journal *SubStance* will act as respondents. For further information and free public access to the archive of the journal *SubStance*, consult the Web site at www.substance.org, or contact Prof. Robert Barsky, <rbarsky@julian.uwo.ca>

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Northampton, MA: November 4-6, 1999

The Program in Comparative Literature at the University of South Carolina announces a conference, "History, Technology, and Identity: After Foucault," March 16-18, 2000. Directed by Martin Donoghue and Paul Allen Miller, this meeting is a follow-up to the two-year international conference "Cultural History after Foucault," held in 1997 and 1998 at the universities of Amsterdam and Aberdeen. Plenary speakers will include Thomas Flynn (Emory), David Konstan (Brown), John Neubaur (Amsterdam), G.S. Rousseau (De Montfort and Oxford), and Jerald Wallulis (South Carolina). We seek to examine both the limits and contributions of Foucault's thought in the three interrelated topics of history, technology, and identity. Send inquiries and one-page abstracts for 20-minute papers to Paul Allen Miller, Program in Comparative Literature, Welsh Hall University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208; T: (803) 777-0473; email: <pamiller@sc.edu>. Selected papers will be published in the journal *Intertexts*. Abstracts must be received by December 1, 1999. For updated information, visit our Web site: <http://www.cla.sc.edu/COMP/2ndannualc.html>

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HISTORY, TECHNOLOGY, AND IDENTITY

Hypotheses

ISAAC NEWTON HAD A FUNNY notion of time. He thought that it flowed smoothly—"equally," as he put it—at a steady rate from past to future. We know, of course, that this is nonsense. Time has different tempi. In the run-up to New Year's Eve, for instance, it goes at a gallop. Then, in January and February, it creeps along at a miserable pace.

Moreover, time moves faster for some of us than others. Old people are being rushed forward into the future at a cruelly rapid clip. For little children, however, time seems to go quite slowly. A single summer can expand into an eternity. One psychologist has estimated that, subjectively, by the age of eight you have lived two-thirds of your life.

One way researchers have tried to measure the subjective flow of time is by asking people in different age groups to estimate when a certain amount of time has passed. People in their early twenties tend to be quite accurate in judging when three minutes has elapsed, typically being off by less than three seconds. Those in their sixties, by contrast, miss the mark on average by forty seconds. Somewhat counterintuitively, their sense of time speeds up because their inner clocks are ticking off seconds at a slower pace. Three minutes and forty seconds slip by in what seems to them like only three minutes.

The river of time may have its rapids and its calmer stretches, but one thing would seem to be certain: It carries all of us, willy-nilly, in its flow. Irresistibly, irreversibly, we are being hastened toward the turn

TIME PASSAGES

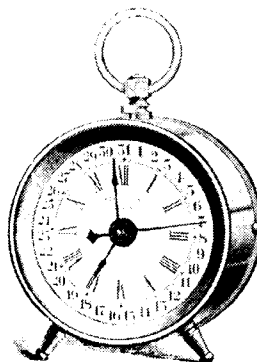
How long does it take for
a second to go by?

of the millennium, and thence to our deaths. That is not only what Newton thought, it's what we know in our hearts.

But it's all a monstrous illusion—so says contemporary science. The revolution in our understanding of time began with Albert Einstein, who discovered that there is no such thing as *now*. Whether or not two distinct events are happening "at the same time" all depends on where an observer is located, as well as on that observer's speed and direction of motion, Einstein proved. Suppose, for example, that Jones is walking uptown on Fifth Avenue and Smith is walking downtown. Because of their different trajectories, there will be a discrepancy of several days in what they would judge to be happening "now" in the Andromeda galaxy at the moment they pass each other. For Smith, the space fleet launched to destroy life on Earth is already on its way; for Jones, the Andromedan council of tyrants has not even decided whether or not to send the fleet.

Once simultaneity goes by the board, the very division of moments into past and future becomes meaningless. Events judged to be in the past by one observer may still lie in the future of another observer, so the future must be as definite as the past. "If there's one thing we can be sure of in

physics," said the great cosmologist Fred Hoyle, "it is that all times exist with equal reality." In place of the fleeting present, we are left with a vast frozen timescape. Here, you are being born. There, you are celebrating the arrival of the year 2000. And over there, you've been dead for a while. Nothing is "flowing" from one event to another.



Einstein furnished a rigorous justification for a view of time that goes back to McTaggart, to Spinoza, to Augustine, even to Parmenides. Time is an illusion, according to this "staticist" view. The only rational way to see the universe is as God sees it: *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Yet despite Einstein et al., we cannot help feeling ourselves to be slaves to one part of this timescape (the past) and hostages to another part (the future). Nor can we help feeling ourselves to be quite literally running out of time.

Sir Arthur Eddington, one of the first physicists to grasp Einstein's relativity theory,

declared that our sense of time's passage is so powerful that it must correspond to *something* in the objective world. If science could get no purchase on all this, we might be justified in saying: So much the worse for science! But things are not quite that bad. Scientists have recently learned, for instance, that our conscious *now*—also known as the "specious present"—spans about three seconds, because that is the interval over which our brains knit up arriving sense data into a unified experience. Evidence also suggests that a cluster of neurons in the midbrain acts as a sort of "time organ," and that a brain chemical called dopamine influences the way that organ measures subjective temporal spans. In a traumatic event like a car accident, dopamines may flood the brain, slowing down your sense of time so that seconds can feel like minutes.

It is also pretty clear that the nature of memory has something to do with the feeling that we are moving in time. The past and the future might be equally real, but—for reasons having to do, oddly enough, with thermodynamics—we cannot "remember" events in the future, only in the past. This fact gives a direction to time's arrow. It does not, unfortunately, explain why that arrow seems to fly.

Still, you do not have to be a scientist to know the speed with which we are all edging into the future: precisely one second per second. That is the rate at which we must go on killing time—until time kills us.

JIM HOLT

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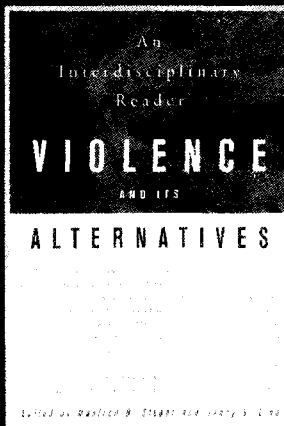
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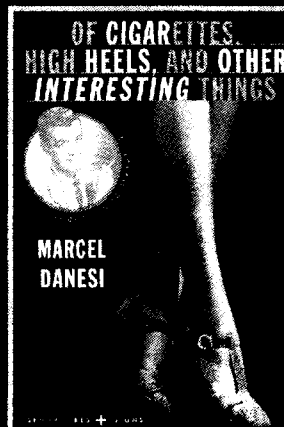
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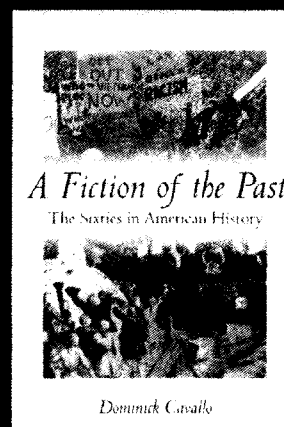
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